

THE INVENTION OF THE CRITIC IN ENGLAND, 1570-1640

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ABSTRACT

WILLIAM McCULLOUGH RUSSELL: The Invention of the Critic in England, 1570-1640
(Under the direction of Jessica Wolfe)

This dissertation examines the social and intellectual forces that shaped the idea of the literary critic in early modern England. Histories of criticism too often neglect critical identity, fastidiously tracing the development of such concepts as imitation yet taking for granted the idea of the critic as stable and transparent. This study complicates that idea by historicizing it in the very period when the word *critic* first began to signify an expert in literary judgment. Revising reductive assessments of this era of criticism as the sum of its classical parts, I argue that the idea of the critic in early modern England was negotiated in a discourse equally responsive to classical precedent and to the economic, political, and religious circumstances of a rapidly changing national landscape. Such pivotal moments as the erection of public theaters in London, the Marprelate controversy, the tide of anti-intellectualism rising from what Gabriel Harvey called “the world of business,” and the English chapter of the scientific revolution forced English critics from Sidney to Jonson to reevaluate the basis and scope of critical authority. Consensus around the idea of the critic curiously arises not from compartmentalization but from dispersion, as critics open themselves up to interdisciplinary discourse and as agents outside the field of literary studies, such as it was, begin to value and appropriate its resources. As they consider the relation of criticism to politics, to private enterprise, and to the natural and social sciences, early modern English critics reveal themselves as our forebears by introducing a set of critical dilemmas that continue to resonate in our field today.

For Lauren

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I have often wryly described this project as the perfect introduction to the profession. How better to begin the work of criticism than by studying the idea of the critic itself? Writing about that idea has made me painfully self-conscious about the process of critical invention essential to any dissertation and pleasantly aware of my own good fortune in having such excellent models at hand. Over the last six years, Reid Barbour and Jessica Wolfe have taught me the meaning of scholarship. Whatever success I have achieved I owe to them, to the example they set, and to the inspiration they gave me to follow it. Mary Floyd-Wilson, Darryl Gless, and Ritchie Kendall provided incisive and intellectually generous readings and helped me to think critically about the limitations and possibilities of this project going forward. Thanks are due here to Andrew Campbell and Edward Tayler as well, my first teachers, to whom I owe an enthusiasm for literary study that not even graduate school could fade. They were with me at every turn.

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INTRODUCTION: THE IDEA OF THE CRITIC

Censurer, carper, railer, backbiter, detractor, pedant, doctor, clerk, grammarian, Momus, Zoilus, Aristarchus, Polyposus, Nasutus, judge, reader, teacher – the figure who occupies the next three-hundred odd pages assumes and is called by a variety of names, strikes and is caricatured in a variety of poses, and undertakes and is thought to fulfill a variety of obligations, some productive and some destructive, some useful and some useless, depending, in any given case, on whom we ask. In early modern England, this diffuse and often contradictory set of ideas began to coalesce around the word *critic*, which underwent a remarkable shift in meaning at the turn of the seventeenth century.¹ Once a marker for the armchair find-fault of all spheres of experience, *critic* gradually came to suggest in this era a recognized authority in literary judgment, someone whom historians, natural philosophers, and others outside the field of literary studies, such as it was, could appeal to for specialized knowledge.² In between these two not altogether discrete *personae*, arising from the rich

¹ For an overview of this shift, see “critic, n.1,” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989). See also Wellek, pp. 21-36, for a useful history of the term *criticism*, which is, however, modified and updated in important ways by the present study.

² See Ann Blair, “Natural Philosophy and the ‘New Science’,” *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism*, Vol. III: *The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 449-57, who warns against either strictly distinguishing between or equating natural philosophy, literature, and criticism, disciplines which all shared a basis in humanism in the early modern period. Much like criticism, the natural philosophy of the sixteenth century primarily involved “the compilation, criticism, and explication of texts” such as Aristotle’s *Physics* (450). This only began to change in the seventeenth century, largely as a result of developments in scientific method that ultimately led to Newton “[removing] the study of physics beyond the ken of the educated non-specialist” (456). The present study contends that attempts by critics, natural philosophers, and writers in other changing fields, such as historiography, to distinguish themselves and their authority were mutually constitutive within a network of cross-cultural discourse. It is telling that the *OED* cites Francis Bacon’s novel use of the word *critic* to distinguish and refer externally to an authority in literary judgment, a gesture that does as much for the idea of the natural philosopher as it does for the idea of the critic. By the

variety of critical performances and portraits produced in England between Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poesy* (pub. 1595) and Ben Jonson's *Discoveries* (pub. 1640), stands a host of divergent ideas about the limits of critical authority and what Terry Eagleton, echoing Yvor Winters and Matthew Arnold, has called "the function of criticism."

This dissertation investigates these ideas and the social and intellectual forces that shape them. I argue that the idea of the critic in early modern England was the product of a broad-based dialogue that depends equally upon internecine antagonism and interdisciplinary consensus and responds equally to classical precedent and the economic, political, and religious circumstances of a rapidly changing national landscape. Critical dilemmas thought to arise only after the Restoration, with the proliferation of periodical literature, in fact emerge nearly a century earlier as those circumstances enforce (as they often put it) English critics to consider the relation of criticism to politics, to private industry, and to the natural and social sciences.

Documented by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the changes undergone by the word *critic* in the early modern period make it possible, if not necessary, for us to discuss such writers as Stephen Gosson, Philip Sidney, Gabriel Harvey, Thomas Nashe, and Ben Jonson as critics. At the same time, however, the alignment of priorities and coherence of traditions implied by the titles of such classic anthologies as G. Gregory Smith's *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (1904) and Joel Elias Spingarn's *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century* (1907) – and the view commonly expressed by the editors of such anthologies that "Renaissance literary theory was perfectly coherent, being based on the union of rhetoric and ethics" (Vickers 53) – are belied, as are any similar implications of my own title, by the irreducible variety of

1630s, appeals between criticism and natural philosophy could be made with a new degree of precision and self-consciousness independent of the ideals and practices of humanism. I take up this and other avenues of interdisciplinary critical discourse in the fifth chapter.

critical perspectives and methodologies contained within them. In discussing early modern English criticism as such, we stall ourselves by placing the cart of modernity before the etymological horse, applying a term anachronistically to the very body of writings that historically constitute its meaning. To invoke the early modern English critic is to pass over the invention of the critic in silence.

The frenetic plurality represented by the long yet incomplete list of names above, a plurality with which I intend to qualify from the get-go my own use of the words *critic* and *criticism*, informs the guiding conviction of this study, which is simply that the idea of the critic in early modern England was under negotiation. As Paul D. Cannan has observed in his recent study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century dramatic criticism, “until well past 1700, an identifiable discipline of criticism simply did not exist in England: what criticism was, who should practice it, and why it was worth practicing, were all open questions” (2). Indeed, the realization of such a discipline may be postdated even further – or postponed indefinitely, as I consider briefly in the epilogue. The tendency of historians of criticism to postdate or antedate the advent of modern criticism, reading, as Cannan does “skirmishes and interventions” (11) as signs of gestation, reflects perhaps the one feature of criticism that remains constant across history, a polyphonic contrariety acknowledged by many early modern critics, most directly, as we shall see in the fifth chapter, by Ben Jonson.

Nevertheless, if it fails to establish date of birth, examining the agents involved and the stakes attached to the negotiation of the idea of the critic in early modern England promises to enrich not only our understanding of the literature and culture of that era but also, in a more general sense, our understanding of the relationship between the creation and reception of literary art, the relationship between literary art and the culture that produces it, and, more generally still, the constitution of social roles. Attending to that negotiation

demands that we shift the traditional focus of the history of criticism from the ideas of criticism – standbys such as imitation and decorum – to the idea of the critic. For the distinctions marked by that list of names derive not from differences of critical opinion but rather from differences over the scope of critical inquiry and the criteria of proper critical practice. They are factors not of critical but of metacritical arguments.

This dissertation therefore draws upon but crucially modifies a long tradition of scholarship. In early modern England, the rise of the vernacular, the emergence of print culture, and the advent of public theater in London all contributed to, without accounting entirely for, an outpouring of literature in English that some have elected to call the English Renaissance. Attendant upon this development from the start was a critical discourse that sought from a variety of perspectives to evaluate its products both individually and collectively, practically and theoretically. Works of scholarship dating back to Spingarn's *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance* (1899) have acknowledged this putatively ancillary body of writings, and its chief practitioners in Sidney, Jonson, and Bacon, either in particular or as part of a longer history of criticism.

By and large, such works have emphasized critical theory at the expense of social context, presenting the history of criticism as the transmission of a set of key ideas through a series of key works. This approach allows Spingarn to narrate the emergence of literary criticism in sixteenth-century England as “a twice-told tale” (166), a distant echo of earlier developments in France and Italy, which Spingarn understands in terms of an overarching contest between “romantic” (Plato) and “classical” (Aristotle) elements. G. Gregory Smith, in the introduction to his anthology of *Elizabethan Critical Essays* (1904), incorporates these elements into a numbered list of “Special Problems” – topics such as decorum, prosody, and diction – that order the wild variety of Elizabethan criticism. Longer histories, beginning

with George Saintsbury's three-volume *History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe* (1900-04), share in this reductive spirit, attempting through a combination of rapid-fire summary and broad analysis to grant narrative coherence to the history of criticism "from the earliest texts to the present day." In *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957), W. K. Wimsatt, Jr., and Cleanth Brooks trace, albeit with greater intellectual rigor than their predecessors, the most enduring themes of western literary criticism from Plato to the New Critics. Their treatment of the English Renaissance is representative, placing Sidney at the tail end of a chapter on courtly Italianate criticism and Jonson at the front end of a chapter on neoclassicism. René Wellek, in his definitive eight-volume *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* (1955-92), is even more economical, aligning the advent of modern criticism with the dissolution of neoclassicism and dismissively characterizing "the history of criticism from the beginning of the Renaissance to the middle of the 18th century" with "a view of literature which is substantially the same in 1750 as it was in 1550" (5) and of merely antiquarian interest (v).

Even more specialized studies of Renaissance criticism from this era, such as Baxter Hathaway's *Marvels and Commonplaces: Renaissance Literary Criticism* (1968), which presents the history of Renaissance literary criticism as a contest between "realism" or "the verisimilar" and "idealism" or "the marvelous," and organizes its argument according to five dominant themes (imitation, universal versus particular, catharsis, imagination, and art versus nature), bear the mark of Spingarn. Bernard Weinberg, who prefaces his indispensable *History of Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (1961) by situating its goals and methodology directly in opposition to those of Spingarn, at once overhauls and continues the tradition by vastly expanding Spingarn's truncated bibliography while endorsing his commitment to a set of governing ideas and decisive debates. That commitment is effectively, though not exclusively, sustained by the recently published Renaissance volume of the *Cambridge History*

of Literary Criticism (1999), which includes chapters on Aristotle, Horace, Cicero, Quintilian, invention, and *ut pictura poesis*. The drift of these works is theoretical and largely etiological. Though they succeed in providing a strong sense of the intertextuality of early modern criticism and of the debts, both ancient and modern, incurred by the critics of that period, their approach unduly abstracts critical discourse, as if its debates had occurred in a vacuum. The cost of unified structure, whether the classical-romantic dialectic in Spingarn or the realist-idealist dialectic in Hathaway, is any sense of the wider and wilder world in which these ideas were spawned, the sounds and smells of Scaliger's Agen or Jonson's London.

Other works have attempted to redress the shortcomings of the Spingarn tradition and to enrich the history of criticism with social context. Vernon Hall's *Renaissance Literary Criticism: A Study of Its Social Content* (1945) seeks to establish the "influence of nondemocratic social ideals upon literary criticism" (2). For Hall, Renaissance literary criticism is a political phenomenon, not an aesthetic one. Its function in England was to advance the Elizabethan aristocracy's push to unite the nation under an absolute monarch. Russell Fraser turns the discussion to the middle class in *The War Against Poetry* (1970), reading the Puritan opposition to the stage as a symptom of "a more thoroughgoing animus" (28) among the bourgeoisie and "an oblique attack on the statecraft of the Tudors and Stuarts, and the polity of Hooker and Laud" (162-3). Critics such as Peter Hohendahl and Terry Eagleton have enlivened this socially contextualized branch of the history of criticism with the critical theory of Jurgen Habermas. Warily acknowledging the limitations of the concept, Eagleton pessimistically traces the history of modern European criticism from its inception in the periodical literature of eighteenth-century England to the present (1984), in which criticism "lacks all substantive social function" (7), in terms of the relation of the critic to the Habermasian public sphere. Other critics, such as Robert Matz, have similarly sought to

revitalize the history of criticism through the work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, whose concept of cultural capital provides a means of addressing the social valence of literary judgment. Recent studies of Ben Jonson by Joseph Loewenstein, Richard Burt, and Richard Dutton have made valuable contributions to this growing body of work investigating the social context of literary criticism by historicizing and thus complicating the ideas of authorship and criticism in the early modern period. M. A. R. Habib's recent *A History of Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present* (2005) registers the impact of this approach and represents its successful application to the long history of criticism.

Together, these works suggest that the critic is always talking about something more than poetry, a suggestion borne out at length, in detail, and with certain qualifications by the present study. As we shall see, where individual critics draw the line that separates poetry from "more than poetry" and how willing they are discursively to cross that line determines to a great extent the idea of the critic evoked by their criticism. In the early modern period as now, the degree to which critics categorically privilege literature as a mode of expression is inversely proportionate to their ability to lay bare its relation to other fields of discourse. We shall see this principle at work in the first two chapters, where it not only determines the difference between Stephen Gosson and Philip Sidney as critics but perhaps also accounts for the indirect nature of their critical debate. While Gosson levels popular poetry and drama with other forms of abusive social action, Sidney abstracts it out of the circumstances of contemporary England and idealizes it beyond all other arts, theoretically conceived. The same critical impulse that inspires Sidney strictly to distinguish between the idea of Poetry (poetry *in posse*) and the unfortunate fact of contemporary English poetry (poetry *in esse*) may also have prevented him from directly replying to Gosson, a middle-class Londoner who had ambitiously dedicated both critical and poetic works to Sidney.

Beyond enriching the history of criticism with social context, such studies, often without claiming to, invite us to complicate our understanding of the idea of the critic in early modern England. By challenging, for instance, the distinction between criticism and censorship (Burt) and revealing the influence of the market practices of publishers (Loewenstein) and the regulatory measures of the state (Dutton) upon notions of authorship, recent contributions to the history of criticism have made it all the more difficult for us to leave unexamined the meaning of the terms *critic* and *criticism* in the period. This dissertation addresses this issue head-on and with greater historical breadth than has yet been attempted.

If on occasion historians of criticism have thrown glances at or made provocative gestures toward the idea of the critic, no study has yet addressed the idea directly and independently across the full scope of early modern English criticism. Since Spingarn, the history of criticism has consistently overlooked the idea of the critic in preference of the ideas of criticism, taking the former for granted as stable and transparent. Recent exceptions to this trend have tended either to present criticism as a factor of authorship – a tool with which an author like Jonson establishes his authorial identity and exerts control over the reception of his works – or to conflate the roles of author and critic sight unseen. They offer us no means by which to understand the distinction and tension between these roles acknowledged by early modern authors and critics alike. Even poet-critics such as Spenser and Jonson depend in their works on the differences between these roles for the expression of their priorities in each capacity. The political and religious commitments of Spenser’s “new Poete” stand out in stark contrast to the often misguided erudition of E. K. At the same time, E. K.’s regularly frustrated attempts to reveal the topical significance of Spenser’s poem stage a metacritical struggle between pedantry and an imperfectly realized vision of socially invested criticism. Two decades after *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), Ben Jonson

underscores this distinction in *Poetaster* (1601), a play that not only pits Horace and Virgil against their most vicious critics but, in a dramatic epilogue, presents a symposium of sorts between the “Author” of the play and two very different critics, “Polyposus” and “Nasutus.” In the *Discoveries*, Jonson distinguishes critical capacity from the inventive capacity of the author in the equally “welcome work” of sorting out a bustle of diverse opinions, many of them contrary in themselves, on behalf of posterity.

Beyond establishing this distinction, shifting the focus of the history of criticism away from the ideas of criticism toward the idea of the critic reveals the rhetorical affinity of criticism to literary art, the instrumentality of criticism to the production of literary art, and the inextricably embedded social roots of both. The critics examined in this dissertation undertake criticism as a performance and, to varying degrees, acknowledge this approach. Whether through sustained declamatory prosopopoeia or the fashioning of dramatic critical stand-ins, these critics consistently borrow resources from their object of study. Gosson invokes the schoolmaster and anxiously acknowledges his performance as a potentially corruptive model of critical propriety. Sidney finds in the idea of the golden world both a defense of poetry and a principle of critical practice. Such critics as Puttenham, Spenser, and Nashe reveal further affinity between poetry and criticism and demonstrate their understanding of the reciprocity between the two by blaming criticism for the low standing of poetry in England.

What emerges from our shift thus reflects the social alignment of poetry and criticism in the west from their inception in ancient Greece. For if attention to social context represents an innovation in the history of criticism, it is hardly a new feature of criticism itself. Andrew Ford reminds us in *The Origins of Criticism* (2002) that the critic, like the poet, began as a “performer before a social group” (3). In fact, the two figures originate

in the selfsame social milieu, the *symposia* of ancient Greece, drinking parties in which poems and songs were performed and spectators responded, sometimes with songs of their own in a stylized form of discourse (25). Although these original features endure in the early modern period, they function as variables rather than constants. As we shall see, Sidney and Jonson can be distinguished as critics not by *whether* they consider criticism to be social in basis and discursive in nature – indeed, both do – but by the particular societies from which their criticism emerges and to which it addresses itself and by the limits they set to its discursive reach.

What emerges is, in some sense, a collection of stories rather than a set of ideas. It is not thumbing through Deuteronomy that convinces Gosson of the threat posed to the commonwealth by popular drama; rather, it is standing elbow to elbow with the groundlings and peering down alleyways in London like Clifford Geertz doing fieldwork in Bali. Chatting up Pugliano in Vienna, it occurs to Philip Sidney not that the neo-Platonists were right and that the saving grace of poetry is the location of its object of imitation in the Ideas of the intelligible world; rather, it occurs to him that he might amuse and impress himself and his friends at court by writing a mock-encomium on that “unelected vocation” with which he filled his undesirable, given his political ambitions, abundance of free time. Gabriel Harvey looks around at Cambridge and notices that the students have traded their volumes of Cicero for copies of *Il Cortegiano*. Thomas Nashe wanders through the bookstalls of St. Paul’s churchyard and witnesses the ravages of a literary plague. Ben Jonson sits down to read a volume on botany and, like a stone cast into still water, the book sends concentric ripples of discursive associations coursing through his mind.

In terms of methodology, shifting from the ideas of criticism to the idea of the critic means reading for metacritical rather than critical content. This requires entertaining the

notion that every work of criticism presents at least two arguments: a primary argument pertaining, whether practically or theoretically, to literary art and a secondary argument pertaining to the idea of the critic or proper critical practice underlying the primary argument. Whereas the primary argument appears more or less explicit and emphatic, the secondary is often made implicitly and with a degree of anxiety, and its conclusions accordingly require distillation. The distinction might be made in terms of denotation and connotation or, borrowing a helpful expression from sociologist Erving Goffman, it might be said that the primary argument *gives* one expression while the secondary *gives off* another.³

This methodological consideration opens up a larger theoretical question regarding the relationship between the agency of the individual self and the creation of social or literary roles. It is a question that has received significant attention not just in the works of Erving Goffman but also in notorious essays on the idea of the author by Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault and in the work of early modernists such as Eckhardt Auberlen, Stephen Greenblatt, Thomas Greene, and Richard Helgerson. Auberlen notes in his study of authorial self-representation in early modern England that “[t]he application of sociological concepts of role in the field of literary studies is considerably facilitated by the fact that sociologists borrowed the term from the theater” (20). The point might be pushed even further: we need not introduce the question of social role-formation into early modern England; it is already there, as More’s Morus, Shakespeare’s Prince Hal, Nashe’s Jack Wilton, and a host of other invented inventors of selves make quite clear. Moreover, figures like Gascoigne’s G. T., who mediates between the reader and the persona and adventures of F. J., and Spenser’s E. K., who occupies a similar position in relation to Immerito and *The Shepheardes Calender*, reveal the sensitivity of early modern English writers to the idea that

³ See Goffman, p. 2. On the distinction between denotation and connotation, see Trimpi, *Plain Style*, pp. viii-ix.

texts and roles have no one commanding author. As Wendy Wall has observed, in early modern England, “the individual’s role in defining authorship went hand in hand with other forces that shaped the material conditions of writing” (85). Accordingly, “readers saw texts as part of a social network which was authorized variously by multiple groups and institutions” (83). This consideration helps to liberate the early modernist from the uncomfortable burden of positing genealogical origins and allows us instead to present the individual critics of this study as both proponents and exponents of the ideas of the critic they evoke.

In *Self-Crowned Laureates* (1983), Richard Helgerson provides us with an instructive analogy to the relationship between individual critics and the idea of the critic in the relationship examined there between Spenser, Jonson, and Milton and the idea of the laureate. Helgerson offers a subtle and compelling explanation of how speakers retain historical agency within a synchronic structuralist system of meaning:

Clearly, they each speak as well as being spoken through. If one swing in our interpretive circling from gesture to system tends to dissolve the single intending self, the swing back reconstitutes it. Meaning is in difference, the possibility of meaning in a system of differences. But someone must be there to make and to mark the difference. Some one particular person says what has not been said before, what would not be said in the same way, if at all, were he not there – and someone else understands.

(19)

In a similar fashion, Stephen Gosson and the other critics of his era act as distinctive intermediaries between an overdetermined cultural need for critical authority and a set of readers with different kinds and levels of involvement. On one end, historical forces such as the protection provided to players by the Elizabethan court and the economic constraints and possibilities that drove men like Gosson to London and the press lay claim to some share of ownership or authorship of the idea of the critic in early modern England. On the

other, readers claim a share, sometimes responding to critical performances by adopting and revising the role of the critic themselves, as Lodge and Sidney did in their respective responses to Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse* (1579).

In acknowledgement of this fact, I balance attention to the canonical texts of early modern English criticism with attention to so-called minor texts, putatively marginal figures, and even texts that might initially strike the reader as out of place in a history of criticism, however uncertain the meaning of the word. In doing so, it is not my intention to indulge in tokenism or to cater to the popular taste for what Thomas Nashe calls “new herrings” but rather to honor the conviction expressed at the outset of this introduction that the idea of the critic was the product of a truly broad-based dialogue unfettered by social or stable generic distinctions. Quentin Skinner, in the introduction to *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (1978), outlines a methodology that shifts away from the explication of major texts and attempts instead “to construct a general framework within which the writings of the more prominent theorists can then be situated” (xi). I humbly follow his lead. If Sidney's *Defence* appears to hover over this dissertation like an attendant spirit, anticipating its direction and never losing pace with its author, it is, no less than any other entry in its tradition, informed by its dialectical relationship to, and enriched by our knowledge of, the narratives of other chapters, the legacy of the pedant, the legacy of the detractor, the increasingly apparent interdisciplinary implications of literary judgment – Sidney touches upon, and is in turn touched by, all of this. On the other hand, in dedicating chapters and sections of chapters to Sidney, Jonson, and Spenser, it has been my aim to grant them their due subtlety and to resist utterly reducing any of them to a figure for a mode of criticism (e.g., practical, theoretical) or, worse yet, to a soulless binary marker, a plus or a minus, a 1 or a 0. My hope is to present them in all of their complexity as signs for the complexity tacitly

granted each of the critics studied in these chapters, many of whom must of necessity make briefer appearances.

Again, one of the more general, but in my view no less fruitful, implications of the research presented here is that the invention of the critic depended less upon the isolated actions of individual agents – that is, less upon what a recent anthology of criticism calls *major statements*, which is a bit of a misnomer⁴ – than upon a network of relationships, not just between critics and authors but, just as important, between critics and critics and between critics and the wielders of more recognized forms of authority and the players of more established social roles. With the title of this dissertation, I intend to invoke two meanings of the word *invention*. In its more familiar sense, with its distinctively modern scientific overtones, the word expresses the sheer novelty of the idea of the critic generated by the writings of early modern English critics from Philip Sidney to Ben Jonson. Meanwhile, in its more literal sense, derived from the classical notion of *inventio*, the seeking-out of matter suited to specific rhetorical ends, it suggests that this novel idea was assembled from found materials.⁵

Those found materials range from evidence for critical-historical arguments culled from Plutarch or Cassius Dio to much maligned types such as the pedant or the detractor against which an idea of proper critical practice might be defined. The nature in which these materials are deployed shapes the relationships upon which the idea of the critic depends. In expressing those relationships, I make recourse at will – though, I trust, with consistency – to the vocabulary of classical rhetoric, structuralism, genre theory, social role theory, and

⁴ Charles Kaplan and William Davis Anderson, eds., *Criticism: Major Statements*, 4th ed. (Boston: St. Martin's, 2000).

⁵ See Ullrich Langer, "Invention," *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Vol. III: The Renaissance*, ed. Glyn P. Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999), pp. 136-44.

cultural anthropology. If the rhetorical-theological concept of *apophasis*, or definition through negation, helps to explain the means by which critics negatively define their novel social role, it does not cover the full range of that definition as I understand it. Doing so requires that I also introduce phrases such as “constitutive other” and invoke the structuralist concept of difference. If recourse to Habermas and the concept of the public sphere helps to explain the unique authority claimed by Stephen Gosson through the narration and inductive analysis of what he terms “common experience,” it fails to explain his appeals to aristocratic patrons and civic authorities and the anxiety that critical authority produces in him, for which we must look not to Habermas but to the specifics of historical circumstance. Similar claims can be made with regard to the concept of cultural capital or Bourdieu’s argument that “struggle over legitimate definition ... is a universal property of fields” (245). If these ideas help to explain the invention of the critic, they require us rather restrictively to think of criticism as a profession and fail to address, much less explain, the marked ambivalence of so much early modern English criticism.⁶ Perhaps the only theoretical model I invoke without reservation is that of the consociative critic evoked by Ben Jonson, the subject of the fifth chapter. Confident that the invention of the critic was a matter of discourse rather than edict, I discourse openly and widely, inviting into the symposium voices as distinct and remote as Erving Goffman and Claudio Guillén, Augustine and Quintilian.

Finally, I distinguish the *critic* of my title from the *critici* of the classical world – those grammarians typified by Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 215-c. 143 BC), the notorious editor of Homer – and the textual criticism of the humanists not to segregate these traditions but

⁶ On Bourdieu and the early modern professions, see Edward Gieskes, *Representing the Professions: Administration, Law, and Theater in Early Modern England* (Univ. of Delaware, 2006).

simply to grant the present study a degree of specificity that would necessarily be compromised in a longer narrative. Following the lead of the critics I examine generally keeps me far afield of, if not directly opposed to, the grammarians of the classical and early modern worlds. Yet it also permits me occasionally to make reference to those other traditions, illustrating the fluidity of critical categories without losing sight of the early modern English critic. Both Aristarchus, by name, and the textual criticism of such humanists as Justus Lipsius and the Scaligers figure in the chapters that follow, the latter as a model for E. K.'s commentary in *The Shepheardes Calender*. Nevertheless, I regularly employ the term *modern English critic* to distinguish a tradition of criticism that sought to intercede between the growing body of English literature and its function in early modern English culture. My use of the word *modern* is not only approved but moreover guided by writers such as Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, Robert Allott, John Marston, and Gabriel Harvey, who signal the change they perceive in the English literary landscape with such terms as “modern poetry,” “modern poet,” and even “modern critic.” The distinction made by the word *modern* is therefore less my own argument than an attempt to heed an implicit argument made by these critics in their use of the word.

The rise of vernacular literature in print and the erection of public theaters in London in the 1570s not only created a need for critical mediation but also forced modern English critics to choose between addressing or discounting the social context of literary production. Within this framework, the first two chapters of the dissertation present the indirect critical exchange between Stephen Gosson and Philip Sidney – the event that occasioned Sidney's *Defence* – as a debate over the content or matter of critical discourse. In chapter one, Gosson, an antitheatrical pamphleteer, presents a model of critical practice founded upon what he calls “common experience” by challenging the reification of

putatively timeless poetic ideals with knowledge gleaned from his years spent as a playwright and spectator in the theaters of London. Shedding the humanist strictures that limit the domain of the critic to the page and stage, Gosson expands his critical ken to include the brothels and alleys of early modern London, treating drama as a form of social action, one abuse in a city of abuses.

In the second chapter, Sidney responds to Gosson by abstracting the poet out of the Elizabethan era and narrowing the domain of the critic to the realm of Ideas, trading English poets and dramatists for the Poet, ideally conceived. Comparing Sidney's *Arcadia* to Gosson's *Ephemerides of Phialo*, two romances written contemporaneously with their authors' critical works, I expose a philosophical underpinning in Sidney's work that consistently subordinates the vagaries of common experience to the imperviousness of timeless ideals. The philosophical consistency of these opposed works proves each critic to be less intent upon approximating a preexisting model of critical practice than upon fashioning a new model in his own image. In the final pages of this first part of the dissertation, I examine the metacritical legacy of the Gosson-Sidney debate in terms of a deterministic relationship between the matter and function of criticism.

A decade after the Gosson-Sidney debate, what Gabriel Harvey calls "the world of business" threatened to occlude Sidney's "golden world," forcing those interested in preserving it to demonstrate the practical utility of poetry and criticism. Critics found one means of establishing their relevance, as the third chapter of the dissertation argues, by defining themselves in structural opposition to the pedant, a type made familiar in the sixteenth century by continental writers such as Rabelais and Aretino and imported for English uses by Thomas Wilson, George Puttenham, Sidney, Shakespeare, and others. The silhouette of a forward-looking, pragmatic, and socially invested critic takes shape as critics

articulate proper critical practice through the negative example of the pedant. Nowhere is this gesture more striking than in the pamphlets of Gabriel Harvey, who, widely considered a pedant himself, suffered more for the type than nearly anyone yet recognized as well as anyone its incompatibility with the future of English literature in the world of business.

Defending himself from the satirical onslaught of Thomas Nashe in their notorious paper war, Harvey relies upon another type commonly applied to the critic: that of the detractor, the subject of the fourth chapter. An uncivil, uncharitable, and indiscreet parasite descended from Zoilus, the infamous critic of Homer, and powerfully invoked during the Marprelate controversy, the detractor lends its familiar shape to the critic in countless early modern prefaces and epistles dedicatory. Nashe bristles at the label just as Harvey does at his, and in resisting them, these rivals generate momentum toward a critical middle ground characterized above all by a shared desire to foster the advancement of English literature.

Building upon without attempting to resolve the debates and dialogues that occasioned them, the fifth and final chapter presents Ben Jonson as a beneficiary of and active interlocutor with the ideas and modes of critical and metacritical thought presented in the four previous chapters. I argue that Jonson's oft-noted inconsistency as a critic stems from an idea of the critic predicated upon what he calls "consociation," the pursuit and cultivation of interdisciplinary, cross-cultural avenues of thought that bring critical knowledge to bear upon other fields of discourse and vice versa. The consociative critic Jonson evokes is a self-contained symposium, a platform for a bustle of contrary opinions, and so must be satisfied to be contrary in itself. As a critic, Jonson envisions himself immersed in a stream of inconsistency, where he mediates not just between literary works and our participation in them as readers but also between literary works and themselves and between a myriad of ways of appreciating and depreciating them. The final section of the

chapter steps back from Jonson to examine the idea of the consociative critic from a broader perspective, traversing a network of consociation opened up in the early modern period between critics and other writers over the question of universal decay.

Of course, this, too, is a work of criticism. Perhaps its greatest liability is that it seeks, at times, to overcome that fact and to stand at a scientific distance from its object of study, which happens to be criticism. Like the many critical works considered in its pages, however, this dissertation takes in hand both to demonstrate the relevance of poetry, drama, and prose fiction to that network of discursive relationships we call “culture” and meanwhile to elbow its way into the discourses that constitute that relevance. If I have ignored that sympathy for fear of becoming mired in critical self-consciousness, I have never forgotten that I, too, am more or less playing by unwritten rules, inventing the critic as I go, betraying in individual sentences and paragraphs my own unique assumptions about proper critical practice. That this should be the case with critical tradition so near at hand occasions the sustained irony of the pages that follow. Yet it may also occasion their greatest insight. If, as I argue, criticism consists in affirming, denying, revealing, concealing, fostering, or discouraging relationships, then we should not be surprised to find the idea of the critic constantly in flux as the identities of the individual units that make up those relationships, from writers and readers to forms of civic and state authority and concepts of nature, change. Insofar as the following pages debunk the finitude of the period in which I have bracketed the invention of the critic in my title, they endorse that argument.

PART I: THE MATTER OF CRITICISM

These men must understand that that can bear no excuse which God condemneth; such is the integrity, uniformity, and simplicity of truth that it is ever like itself, it never carrieth two faces in one hood, that thing is nowhere nor at any time lawful by the word of God which is not ever and everywhere lawful.

- Stephen Gosson, on cross-dressing, in *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582)¹

Neither doubt you, because I wear a woman's apparel, I will be the more womanish; since, I assure you, for all my apparel, there is nothing I desire more than fully to prove myself a man in this enterprise.

- Pyrocles, from Philip Sidney's old *Arcadia* (c. 1580)²

¹ sig. E4^r

² p. 22. I follow Robertson in dating the old *Arcadia*. See Sidney, *Old Arcadia*, pp. xv-xix.

CHAPTER ONE: GOSSON'S COMMON EXPERIENCE

I. The Players' Search

In the summer of 1579, London publisher Thomas Woodcock issued a pamphlet entitled *The Schoole of Abuse* by poet and playwright Stephen Gosson.¹ This thin, unassuming octavo condemning the abuse of music, poetry, drama, and other popular pastimes in learned yet folksy prose was to have a profound effect upon the future of English literary criticism by igniting critical debate on an entirely new scale. Responses to *The Schoole of Abuse* spanned the literary kinds from popular drama to learned apologia, and interested parties covered the social scale from the lowliest players of the newly built London theaters to the court of Elizabeth I. “You thought poetrye should want a patron (I think) when you fyrste published this invective,” writes Thomas Lodge in his privately printed response; “but yet you fynd al to many, even *preter expectationem*” (Smith 1.69).

The brightest spark cast by the ensuing clash came from Philip Sidney, to whom Gosson's work had been dedicated. The *Defence of Poesy* (c. 1580, pub. 1595) would quickly be recognized, rightly or wrongly, as the definitive critical treatise of the day, a distinction it has held ever since.² In 1598 it would be published alongside the *Arcadia* and *Astrophil and Stella*, thus manifesting its swift canonization among English readers. Sidney, by that point, had been sublimated into a romantic myth, and Gosson had left the feud behind for a

¹ For a detailed account of the publication history of the pamphlet and information on existing copies, see Ringler, *Gosson*, pp. 140-4, and Kinney, *Markets*, pp. 203-11.

² A. C. Hamilton endorses the sentiments of Henry Olney, editor and publisher of the first printed edition of the *Defence*, who suggests that the work created English poetry, by calling it “the *De Poetica* of our language.” See “Right Poet,” p. 59. Vickers expresses a commonly held opinion, calling the *Defence* “the most unified, concise, and verbally brilliant treatise in Renaissance criticism” (55).

successful career in the church. Despite all that Gosson contributed to criticism, as we shall see, and, later, to what would come to be called the “Puritan attack upon the stage,” by and large his legacy remains to have been the face that launched the *Defence of Poesy*. The frequency with which Gosson – who was raised in Canterbury, educated alongside Richard Hooker at Corpus Christi, and granted a rectorship by Bishop Bancroft (Ringler, *Gosson*, 49) – continues to be misrepresented as a Puritan indicates the extent to which he has been reduced to a foil for Sidney’s gem-like brilliance.³ But the important story of Gosson’s influence upon the idea of the critic in England begins before Sidney’s *Defence*, even before Thomas Lodge tried and failed to publish his own lesser rebuttal.

Just a few months after the publication of *The Schoole of Abuse*, another work of Gosson’s appeared in print, a Euphuistic romance entitled *The Ephemerides of Phialo*. Gosson tellingly appended to this work “An Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse,” in which he responds to the widespread misconstruction of *The Schoole of Abuse* (not a modern convention alone, it seems) by attempting to clarify its argument: “[Poets] thinke that I banishe Poetrie, wherein they dreame; [Pipers] judge, that I condemne Musique, wherein they dote He that readeth with advise the booke which I wrote, shal perceive that I touche but the abuses of all these” (L2). This brief addendum reveals just how immediate and intense the reaction to *The Schoole of Abuse* had been. In the few months since its publication, Gosson explains, the pamphlet had sent ripples even beyond London:

Our players since I set out the Schole of abuse, have travailed to some of mine acquaintance of both Universities, with fayre profers, and greater promises of rewardes, yf they woulde take so much paine as too write against

³ See, for instance, the introduction to Penguin’s recent edition of *Selected Renaissance Literary Criticism* (2004), where Elizabethan opposition to the stage is said to have been “led by Puritans like Stephen Gosson” (Alexander xxxiii); M. A. R. Habib’s *A History of Literary Criticism from Plato to the Present* (2005), where Gosson appears as “a Puritan minister” (261); or the introduction to Brian Vickers’ *English Renaissance Literary Criticism*, where Gosson is numbered among “rabid Puritans in their assault on the stage” (47 n. 51).

mee; at laste like to Penelopees suters, which seeing themselves disdained of her, were glad to encroche with some of her maides, when neither of both Universities, would heare their plea, they were driven too flie to a weake hedge, and fight for themselves with a rotten stake.

(M2^v)

If we take Gosson's account for truth, we gain a valuable insight into the often overlooked importance of his criticism. At the most basic level, the perceived gravity of the threat he posed to the livelihood of the players comes across in their willingness to travel, presumably at their own expense, to Oxford and Cambridge. From their perspective, this critic could not simply be ignored. Yet even more interesting is the story's suggestion, through the compelling image of the players, desperate and frustrated in their search, that Gosson had not merely provoked a response but had at a deeper level revealed a pressing need for something that the London marketplace had not thought to make available and the universities either could not or would not supply: a modern English literary critic capable of authoritatively "writing against" Gosson and defending the poets and playwrights of England.⁴ If the passage leaves the specific features of that critic undefined, it is not because Gosson has chosen to withhold them; it is because they have yet to be determined. What his account of the players' search dramatizes is the mythical moment of generic conception, the moment when the failure of the available forms of expression to accommodate new ideas or circumstances first plants the seed of new forms.

By implicitly casting himself as Odysseus, Gosson would have us recognize shared values between himself and the faithful Penelope of the universities. Yet the comparison also serves to emphasize his estrangement from the universities. Not unlike Phialo, the title character of his romance, who is forced by financial constraints to abandon his studies in Sienna and seek employment in Venice, Gosson left Oxford early for London without a

⁴ On my use of the term "modern" here and elsewhere, see pp. 15-16 of the introduction.

degree.⁵ He nevertheless continued to consider Oxford his home in some sense, and his name on the title page of *The Schoole of Abuse* proudly bears the title “stud. Oxon.” Gosson is, quite consciously, at once of the university and not of the university, a quality he shares with *The School of Abuse* itself, which counterpoises the fruits of his university learning with those of his experience as a London player and playwright, balancing learned allusion with proverbial wisdom and rhetorical acuity with a chatty and idiomatic ethos. Moreover, he readily acknowledges the difficulties presented by this interstitial position. In the Latin epistle that prefaces *The Ephemerides of Phialo*, he confesses that the act of publishing his romance has filled his head with a vision of the university and the multitude (*multitudo*) threatening him from opposite ends (Oxford and London?) with burning torches (5⁵). Later critics such as Thomas Nashe and Ben Jonson would find themselves in the same tight spot, wedged between the humanistic ideals of the universities and the exigencies of the writing life in London.

Regardless of whether he expected ever to return to Oxford, Gosson considers the players’ search a conniving attempt to turn his own beloved family against him and reports their failure with satisfaction – satisfaction he invites his reader to share through the admirable figure of Penelope. It is unclear, however, whether that satisfaction springs from a sense on Gosson’s part that his “acquaintance” at the universities inevitably share his critical values, and therefore support his cause, or rather from a sense of propriety, upheld by his acquaintance and cherished if no longer fully upheld by Gosson himself, that prevents the world of the university a priori from engaging with the world of the players. Misfortune led Phialo from Sienna to Venice, not personal choice, and similar circumstances may well have led Gosson to London and to the social issues addressed in *The Schoole of Abuse*. Simply

⁵ See Ringler, *Gosson*, pp. 16-17, and Kinney, *Markets*, pp. 11-12.

put, the unwillingness of Oxford and Cambridge to answer the players' call does not necessarily signify disagreement with their cause.

If *The Schoole of Abuse* managed to bring the emerging concerns of modern English criticism to the university, Gosson's account of the players' search suggests that it stopped short of persuading the university to make those concerns its own. Whatever the players were searching for, they did not find it at Oxford or Cambridge. Those "maides" whom the notoriously loose-living players settle for toward the end of the passage may stand for Thomas Lodge, who ultimately took up the players' cause. Though Gosson had yet to confirm his suspicions regarding the true identity of his appointed critical adversary, in the "Apologie" he takes solace in knowing that whoever the man is, he is the players' last resort, a rotten stake taken up in a weak hedge. And if he is who Gosson suspects him to be – whoever that may be – he is as risible a scholar as Calvisius Sabinus, who had to hire slaves to prompt him when reciting poetry in front of company (M3^v-M4^r). Gosson makes short work of Lodge's perfunctory defense in *Playes Confuted* (1582), his resolutely antitheatrical follow-up to the "Apologie," and the case may have been as he presents it here: frustrated in their search, the players settled, and the need revealed by Gosson went largely unanswered for the moment.

If we could only discover what, exactly, the players were searching for; whom they attempted to enlist first, second, and so on; or how they articulated their "fayre profers" – indeed, if we could only know whether specific answers to these questions exist – we would know a great deal more than we do now about the idea of the critic in early modern England. Who hides behind that tantalizing word "acquaintance"? From Gosson's days at Corpus Christi, John Rainolds and Richard Hooker remained at Oxford, both angels of Elizabethan rhetoric. Toward the end of the century, Rainolds, Gosson's tutor at Oxford,

would be drawn into a heated critical debate with the Latin dramatist William Gager.⁶ Had the players seen fit to enlist the help of these men or men like them? And had they in turn sent the players packing? Difficult as it is to imagine the put-out players even gaining access to such eminent scholars, the more pertinent question for the study at hand is whether Rainolds, Hooker, or anyone else at Oxford or Cambridge could have played the role being cast. Doubtless they could have answered Stephen Gosson, student of Oxford. But on what authority could they have spoken to his Ovidian exposé of the goings-on among the groundlings?

The players' search provides a fitting emblem for the present study. What Gosson provoked in the summer of 1579, more immediately and perhaps even more crucially than Sidney's *Defence*, which constitutes but one of its many outcomes, was the acute sensation of an unanswered demand, a demand powerfully evoked by the players' wide and fruitless search, for a figure who had yet to be invented, in both senses of that word.⁷ That search continues throughout the early modern period in England, and, concomitantly, the course of this study, as various writers attempt at once to define and fulfill the role of the modern English critic. But it begins here with Gosson and the many voices that were gradually incorporated into the complex debate sparked by *The Schoole of Abuse*. Looming over this debate are the principal figures of Gosson and Sidney, two men who came from places as different as one country can contain, who likely never met or even shared the same

⁶ See pp. 189-91 below.

⁷ The popularity of *The Schoole of Abuse* also speaks to this demand. Eckhard Auberlen offers a useful explanation of the institution of genres in these terms: "Like institutions, genres are created to satisfy social needs, although these needs vary somewhat from individual to individual. An institution is the result of a consensus among the most influential members of the community. In the case of genres, this means that one or several writers offer a text or group of texts whose pattern is imitated by other writers because it fulfills their needs too and finds favor with a larger number of readers; if the readers' needs are also satisfied, their approval – expressed by numerous purchases or public comments – confirms the consensus" (23).

company, yet whose indirect critical discourse nevertheless amounts to a decisive moment in the history of criticism. Its influence derives not from the dialectical resolution of the tensions raised between its two opposed interlocutors but rather from their suspension. In the following two chapters, I present Gosson, Sidney, and their criticism as an index of the various forces in play and ideas at stake in the invention of the critic in England. Working from the premise that criticism always presents both a critical and a metacritical argument, I focus upon the latter and read Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse* and Sidney's *Defence* as evocations of two distinct ideas of the critic characterized by markedly different obligations and entitlements, particularly with regard to the content of critical discourse.

II. Two Arguments

That Gosson's argument was and continues to be misconstrued by his readers as a categorical denunciation of poetry may be partly attributed to its inconsistencies. However effectively it serves as a formal expression of Gosson's critical ambivalence, which will be an important point of emphasis here, the unevenness of the pamphlet, now denouncing, now qualifying its denunciations, forces casual readers to choose between those *sententiae* made pithy and memorable by their elision of that ambivalence and those passages that more faithfully articulate it. Cicero's indictment of poets as "fathers of lyes, Pipes of vanitie, & Schooles of Abuse" (*Schoole* A3^r) quickly becomes Gosson's own and rings in his readers' ears while the undertone of hope struck elsewhere, as in the following conditional statement, goes unheard:

If Players can promise in woordes, and performe it in deedes, proclaime it in their Billes, and make it good in Theaters; that there is nothing there noysome too the body, nor hurtfull to the soule: and that everye one which comes to buye their Iestes, shall have an honest neighbour, tagge and ragge, cutte and longe taylor, goe thither and spare not, otherwise I advise you to keepe you thence, my selfe will beginne too leade the daunce.

(*Schoole* D3^v)

While it would be inappropriate to let the tone of passages like this one overshadow the end of the pamphlet, which is to stir up popular and official opposition to the abuses it exposes, it is equally inappropriate to make an outright enemy of poetry of a critic who takes offense at its abuse. Practically speaking – and when it comes to Gosson, we are almost always practically speaking – Gosson has no more interest in advancing poetic ideals of his own design than he has in advancing those of Maximus of Tyre or Plutarch. Nevertheless, whether we choose to believe that the standards outlined in the passage above can be met or that the impossibility of meeting them is precisely Gosson’s point, the critical ambivalence of the passage expresses Gosson’s sense of the practical need for someone to “leade the daunce” and call English poetry and drama to account.

From this perspective, *The Schoole of Abuse* can be seen to present two closely related arguments. The primary argument pertains to poetry (including drama), proclaims its abuse in contemporary England, bemoans the effects of that abuse upon the commonwealth, and offers practical solutions, including intervention on the part of the Lord Mayor and consumer protest on the part of would-be readers and spectators. William Ringler and Arthur Kinney have examined this argument in detail.⁸ The secondary argument, however, remains almost entirely unexamined.⁹ Metacritical in nature, it pertains to criticism itself and consists in Gosson’s often indirect articulation and imperfect fulfillment of a need for modern critical authority.¹⁰

⁸ This and any future work on Gosson will necessarily be indebted to their exacting scholarship. On what I refer to here as Gosson’s primary argument, see Ringler, *Gosson*, pp. 29-31 and 64-6, and Kinney, *Markets*, pp. 37-43.

⁹ Kinney provides a noteworthy exception in “Argumentation,” *Markets*, pp. 47-51, where he examines the various roles assumed by Gosson in the pamphlet.

¹⁰ For more on the distinction between critical and metacritical arguments, see pp. 10-11 of the introduction.

Yet this is not to say that Gosson is unaware of the metacritical argument of *The Schoole of Abuse*. In each of his three works of criticism, he ties poetic abuse and the popularity of abusive pastimes to the worst tendencies of human judgment, tendencies that pitifully set human beings apart from other, wiser animals who instinctively shield themselves from harm (*Schoole* D2^{r-v}). Human judgment, especially that of Gosson's fellow Londoners, often fails to acknowledge moral threats as readily as it does bodily ones: "So corrupt is our judgeme[n]t in these matters, that wee accompt him a murderer, whome we see delight in sheading of bloode; and make him a jester, that wou[n]deth our conscience" (*Phialo* L8^v). Added to the most basic implications of his having taken on the role of the critic in these works, these claims reveal Gosson's awareness of a need for reform in human judgment, at least within the domain of poetry, drama, and other popular pastimes.

The issue occupied Gosson's mind sufficiently to have been carried over from his critical works to *The Ephemerides of Phialo*, where the first set disputation addresses the topic of "Which way thou mightest behave thy selfe to rebuke thy friende in his fault without offence" (B2^r). *Phialo* presents simple guidelines – judge without passion (B5^{r-v}), never reprove in others a vice of which you yourself are guilty (B6^r), soften the blow with indirect language or some rhetorical "shadowe" (C4^r), temper bitterness with "sweete Syrops" (C4^v) of praise – which can be observed in practice in the "pleasaunt invective" of *The Schoole of Abuse*. In *Playes Confuted*, Gosson undermines Lodge's boilerplate defense of drama as a "Glasse of behaviour" by claiming that those who are socially fit to attend the theater are not intellectually fit to withstand its moral threat (C8^v). The claim provides Gosson with an opportunity to write himself into the work, positively illustrating what the meaner sort lack by itemizing those features which the proper judge uniquely possesses:

A Judge must be grave, sober, discrete, wise, well exercised in cases of government, which qualities are never founde in the baser sort. A Judge

must be immoveable, uncorrupted, upright, neither turning to the right hand, nor to the left; the meaner sorte tottre, they are caried away with every rumor, and so easily corrupted, that in the Theaters they generally take up a wonderfull laughter, and shout altogether with one voyce, when they see some notable cosenedge practised, or some slie conveighance of baudry brought out of Italy.

(C8^v)

Certainly the author of *Playes Confuted* is not promoting the theater to a new audience of intellectual elites; however, he is suggesting that proper judgment exists, that it possesses specific and identifiable features, and that it transcends the limitations that have permitted popular theater in England to go to rot.

Hardly peripheral in his mind, the issue of judgment proves central to Gosson's primary argument in *The Schoole of Abuse*. A lack of critical standards, he explains, has left England with no means by which to measure its ever-increasing poetic output. As a result, poetry, like an uncontained gas, has exceeded all means by which it might have been measured: "the abuses of plaies cannot be shoven, because they passe the degrees of the instrument, reach of the Plummet, sight of the minde, and for trial are never brought to the touchstone" (C5^v). Here we see that Gosson's rhetorically troubling ambivalence pervades the metacritical as well as the critical argument of his pamphlet. Poetic abuses exceed our ability to measure them; worse yet, we never measure them. These words issue forth from the narrow space between the possibility that critical standards might redeem poetry and the possibility that critical standards might simply reveal abuses beyond measure and therefore beyond correction. Between the two arguments of his pamphlet, Gosson realizes both of these possibilities, denouncing the bulk of English poetry and drama on the one hand while, on the other, demonstrating with his own critical performance the capacity of criticism to serve both by establishing and enforcing critical standards. If we take Gosson to banish poetry in *The Schoole of Abuse*, in his own words, we dream (*Phialo* L2^v). Moreover, we render

the idea of the critic presented there obsolete, a critic to end all critics. We overlook the formative significance of those characteristics – the investment in common experience, the expression of a certain anxiety over critical authority, and the invocation of declamatory prosopopeia – that Gosson attributes to his idea of the critic.

III. Common Experience

If exactness be the soul of good titles, Gosson has penned a splendid one for his most famous work: *The Schoole of Abuse, Contayning a pleasaunt invective against Poets, Pipers, Players, Jesters, and such like Caterpillers of a Common wealth, setting up the Flagge of defiance to their mischievous exercise, and overthrowing their Bulwarkes, by Prophane writers, Naturall reason and common experience: A discourse as pleasaunt for Gentlemen that favour learning, as profitable for all that will follow vertue*. The title not only precisely reflects the content of his pamphlet but also goes a long way toward delineating the methodology that characterizes Gosson's idea of the critic. Its subtitle reveals the scope – both vertical and horizontal, not just “Gentlemen” but “all that will follow vertue” – of the audience Gosson targets. Its political and aggressively militaristic diction distinguishes its ethos from that of more narrowly religious and less popular works such as preacher John Northbrooke's *Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine playes or Enterluds with other idle Pastimes, &c., commonly vsed on the Sabboth day, are reprobued by the Authoritie of the word of God and auntient writers* (1577). Chief in significance among the contents of the title, however, are the “Prophane writers” and “common experience” that appear syntactically to meet on the common ground of “Natural reason.”

These elements, which stand for Gosson's three-pronged rhetorical strategy as a critic, reflect the pamphlet's balance of learning and experience in a spirit of democratic appeal. If Gosson's formal education enables him to give the apologists “a volley of prophane writers ... [and] to beate them from their holdes with their owne weapons” (D1'),

his experience as player, playwright, and playgoer permit him to demonstrate to the playgoers of his readership a degree of familiarity that grants his claims an air of legitimacy that eludes the antitheatrical sermons of preachers like Northbrooke: “I perswade my selfe, that seeing the abuses which I reveale, trying the[m] thorowly to my hurt, and bearing the stench of the[m] yet in my owne nose; I may best make the frame, found the schoole, and reade the first lecture of all my selfe, too warne every man to avoyde the perill” (4^v). Experience proves to be the most distinctive feature of *The Schoole of Abuse* and the idea of the critic it evokes. The adjective with which Gosson modifies this feature, “common,” which etymologically connotes the act of binding together, serves a similar function to “Natural,” the adjective with which he modifies “reason.” It suggests that as a critic, Gosson is more interested in binding together than in setting apart; more interested in community than in singularity; more interested in the rule than in the exception; more interested in the poetry we can see than in the poetry we can’t; and finally more interested, learned references notwithstanding, in appealing to the reason possessed by all than to the knowledge possessed by the few.

Gosson’s appeal to common experience in the full title of the *Schoole of Abuse* reflects a practical sensibility that colors all of his published works from *The Ephemerides of Phialo*, a nominal “romance” that eschews narrative for a collection of loosely linked set pieces of “profitable disputation” (4^r), to the *Trumpet of War* (1598), a popular sermon geared toward providing a scriptural pretext for war with Spain. Gosson consistently exhibits an interest in ideas not for their own sake but for their material, verifiable impact upon the state of affairs in what he calls the “Common wealth.”

This sensibility guides him rhetorically as well as philosophically. In the dedicatory epistle that prefaces *Phialo*, Gosson fondly describes his hero to Sidney, dedicatee of both

this and *The Schoole of Abuse*, as one who “hath beene somewhat homely brought up like a rude *Macedon*, and taught too call a spade, a spade without any glosing” (4^r). Although Gosson himself was brought up in Canterbury and educated at the estimable cathedral school there (Ringler, *Gosson*, 5-6), he too affects a rude, colloquial style in *The Schoole of Abuse*, often applying proverbs and idioms in an attempt to align his critical observations with natural law and common sense: “The *Scarabe* flies over many a sweete flower, & lightes in a cowshard: It is the custome of the flye to leave the sound places of the Horse, and suck at the Botch ... And the whole practise of Poets eyther with fables to shew theyr abuses, or with plaine tearmes to unfold theyr mischiefe” (A1^v). The first “disputation” of *Phialo* verifies Gosson’s description of his hero as the plainspoken *Phialo* ably defends himself from a criticism leveled at him by the ambitious *Philotimo*, proving himself wiser, more persuasive, and far less presumptuous than his refined and courtly friend.

In response, *Philotimo* good-naturedly compares *Phialo* to Socrates, for he “applyest all [his] knowledge too reforming of manners” (A8^v). But *Phialo* demurs, expressing impatience with Academic philosophy, the *nihil scio* of Socrates,

and the whole rabble of them which pulled out our eyes, that we mighte not see: and taught us to wander in the dark, giving no credite to their senses, but doubting continually whether Snowe were white, or the Crowe black ... I am driven too confesse that I neither knowe all thinges, which belongeth too God; nor am ignoraunte in all thinges, which is proper too Beastes; but am perfecte in some thinges, unskilfill in other, which life is onely peculiar to man.

(B2^r)

He attributes this “doctrine,” which gives credit to the senses, above all sight, and affirms against Academic skepticism the human capacity for knowledge, to Aristotle, who at the very outset of the *Metaphysics* acknowledges the key epistemological function of the senses, above all sight, in animal life and ranks man above beast with the criteria of reason and art (980a-

81a).¹¹ Thus, in plain speech, Phialo, a character whose circumstantial similarities to his creator have inspired more than one biographical reading of the romance,¹² expresses his insistence upon philosophy that admits the validity of sensory experience and the possibility of human knowledge, and upon learning that directs itself to practical ends. It is far better, he suggests, to apply learning to the reform of manners than merely to “stirre up discention in Schooles” (B2^v). Later, when pitted in debate against the sybaritic Polyphile, who perverts Aristotelian credit in the senses into a mock-Epicurean enslavement to bodily pleasure, Phialo will temper his Aristotelianism accordingly: “Have you not learned that the substance of the minde, cannot bee discerned by outwarde sense?” (H7^r). Yet he does so in a sustained spirit of anti-Academism as he attempts to undermine the courtly Philotimo’s predictable invocation of “Socrates love” (H6^r) in a muddled neo-Platonic panegyric on the beautiful Polyphile. The body must serve the mind, not vice versa. And the importance of the senses in animal life must not, in an effort to fob off “monstrous” Epicureanism, be stressed at the expense of reason, which distinguishes man from beast. “Therefore,” Phialo advises his

¹¹ Phialo goes on to claim that this doctrine is “approved by Foxius, layde open by Tully, and foundely discoursed by Lactantius” (B2^r). The first of these names may indicate Richard Fox, founder of Corpus Christi. The second refers to the second book of Cicero’s *Academia*, where Lucullus and Cicero take up the debate between the Academics and the Stoics over the possibility of knowledge. Lucullus attacks Academic skepticism and argues for the validity of the senses (2.4); Cicero responds in defense of skepticism, contending that the uncertainty of the senses makes knowledge impossible (2.20). The third name refers to Book III of Lactantius’s *Divinarum Institutionum*, where the church father rejects the truths of philosophy, skepticism included, and argues that the only truth available to man is the knowledge of God. Ringler, however, has suggested that Gosson’s most direct source for Phialo’s opposition to Socrates and the tradition of Academic skepticism was John Rainolds, who himself interrogates the validity of Socrates’ *nihil scio* in one of the lectures recorded in *D. Ioannis Rainoldi, olim Graecae linguae praelectoris in collegio Corporis Christi apud Oxonienses orationes duodecim. cum alijs quibusdam opusculis* (1619) (Gosson 13). Rainoldes reasons, with reference to Plutarch, that Socrates employed this pedagogical device disingenuously or ironically as a means of increasing zeal and correcting pride among his young students. The real fault lies with those followers of Socrates who took his *nihil scio* at face value and employed it themselves “ut cum Socrate nihil scirent [so that they might know nothing along with Socrates]” (Rainolds, *Orationes*, 467).

¹² See, for instance, Ringler, *Gosson*, p. 18, and Kinney, *Markets*, p. 12.

friend, “throwe downe the love of Socrates” (J^r). Here again, like a rude Macedon, Phialo calls a spade a spade.

Ultimately, the practical sensibility that makes Academic philosophy so distasteful to Gosson will force him to exclude himself from the tradition of criticism he helps to inaugurate in 1579 by trading criticism for unqualified opposition to the stage. *Playes Confuted in Five Actions* (1582), Gosson’s final entry in the public debate that began with *The Schoole of Abuse*, presents formal evidence of his enduring Aristotelianism with a structure modeled upon the four Aristotelian causes. Gosson devotes four of his *Five Actions* to the efficient, formal, material, and final causes of popular drama, revealing, for instance, the Devil to be its efficient cause, and adds a fifth chapter to discuss, as we might now justifiably expect, “[the] Effects [that] this poyson works amo[n]g us” (G4^r). Whereas *The Schoole of Abuse* had been marked by a certain critical ambivalence and had seemed to allow at least for the possibility of good poetry, and even of poetic reform, Gosson here leaves behind critical quibbling, qualifications, and the rhetorical delights of that advisedly “pleasaunt invective” for a work that plainly, resolutely, and forcefully argues that plays “are not to be suffred in a Christian common weale” (TP). Gosson seems never to come up for air. He goes so far as to dismiss rhetorical devices such as metaphor as the enticements of the devil (D8^v-E1^r). The arguments he adduces from scripture and the church fathers, most notably that cross-dressing is prohibited by Mosaic law (E3^r), will prove indispensable to the host of antitheatrical pamphlets to come (Ringler, *Gosson*, 125-7).

Yet in poring over these religious texts to research his argument, Gosson has neither forgotten nor abandoned his commitment to practical ends. He argues that the abolition of stage plays will improve church attendance in London (C3^v) and brings his exegetical argument down to earth by suggesting that it is only a pace or two ahead of the inevitable

policy changes that will follow upon the effects “of such lesso[n]s as are learned at Plaies” (C6^v), which threaten not only London’s collective conscience but also “[to] privately breake into every mans house” (C7^v). Utterly rejecting the paradoxical neo-Platonic logic that permits Pyrocles to woo Philoclea in the *Arcadia* simultaneously as a man and as a woman, as himself and as someone else, Gosson insists that the “trueth ... is ever like it selfe, it never carrieth two faces in one hooode” (E4^v).

Common experience provides the basis upon which Gosson founds his primary argument in *The Schoole of Abuse* in the notion that poetry is not merely an idea but a material product as well. To find it, he suggests, we need therefore to look not to the example of Homer nor to the axioms of classical criticism but rather in the bookstalls and playhouses of contemporary London. Doing so makes the discrepancy between ideal and actual poetry painfully clear: “if they that are in authoritie, and have the sworde in their handes to cut off abuses, shoulde call an acco[m]pt to see how many Chirons, Terpandri, and Homers are heere, they might cast the summe without pen, or counters, and sit downe with Racha, to weepe for her Children, because they were not” (B1^{r-v}). Gosson hardly distinguishes himself as a critic with this unflattering comparison of contemporary and ancient poets, actual and ideal poetry. The trope goes back as far as the mythological figures of Orpheus and Amphion and is a fixture of early modern criticism. What distinguishes Gosson is his emphasis of the “actual” end of this comparison beyond any other critic of his age and his near complete dismissal of the relevance of poetic ideals to modern poetic practice.

“I am not so rude/unrefined in the best of things [Non sum ita rerum optimarum rudis],” Gosson writes in the Latin epistle to *Phialo*, “that I would ever deny that Poetry is number, that number is order, that order is divine, that it has, as it were, flowed down from the summit of wisdom [ut negem aliquando Poesin esse numerum, numerum ordinem,

ordinem de coelo, quasi de iugo sapientiae defluxisse]” (5^v). Yet, he adds, “These facts, however, no more prove that all poets are divine than that all doctors are Aesculapius [Nihilo tamen magis ista probant Poetas omnes esse divinos, quam Medicos omnes, Aesculapios]” (5^v). Though Gosson acknowledges the logic behind the kind of metaphysical reasoning that had permitted Plotinus, and would permit Sidney in the *Defence*, to reconcile Platonism and poetry by making the world of ideas the direct object of poetic imitation, he questions the relevance of such theory to the practice of poetry such as he finds it in London. The invocation of neo-Platonic theory or the hypostatization of quasi-divine models such as Aesculapius ultimately fails to persuade him – fails, that is, to close the gap he perceives between the world of ideas and the world of experience. After all, he notes, “Terpandrus,” the ancient Greek poet and musician who invented the seven-string lyre, introduced the mixolydian mode, and prevented civil war in Sparta with his song, “neyther pyped Rogero nor Turkelony [popular English dances]” (*Schoole* A8^v).¹³

Gosson accordingly leaves such matter behind in preference of experientially informed, socially oriented, and practically minded criticism. Rather than advance a metaphysical argument on the relationship between dramatic representation and truth, he takes issue with the players’ bold disregard for Elizabethan sumptuary laws (C5^v-C6^f). His solution to the failure of popular drama even to attempt to approximate the ideals hollowly invoked by its champions is not, as will be the case with Jonson, a clearly articulated set of ideals and a strident call for methodized poetic reform. Rather, he recommends that London officials take legislative steps toward the suppression of popular drama (E8^{f-v}) and that Londoners exercise the small share of moral authority allotted them as consumers by boycotting the playhouses (D3^v, F4^{f-v}). By treating the abuse of poetry as a social issue rather

¹³ See “Terpandrus,” *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2003).

than an affront to poetic idealism, Gosson situates the critic squarely in the world of experience. Beyond dictating his uniquely practical solutions, this perspective informs his consistent emphasis of an empirical methodology and regular advertisement of those questionable credentials that he believes make him ideally suited for the role of critic as he understands it.

In Gosson's view, it is experience, more than anything else, that entitles him to critical authority and to an audience: "Experto crede, I have seene somewhat, and therefore I thinke may say the more" (C1^r). At this point in his career, before trading common experience for exegesis and criticism for outright denunciation in *Playes Confuted*,¹⁴ Gosson sets all that he has witnessed in the theaters of London over against the classical ideals and precedents that players and poets might adduce in support of the theater and even the scriptural arguments that antitheatrical preachers might advance in opposition to it. Yet the importance of experience to the critical model presented in *The School of Abuse* goes beyond even this, becoming in its final pages the measure of critical propriety: "he that taketh upon him to shew men their faults, may wound his own credite, if he goe too farre ... Therefore I will content my selfe to shew you no more abuses in my Schoole, then my selfe have seene, nor so many by hundreds, as I have heard off" (E4^v-E5^r). The Gossonian critic thus both rhetorically arms himself with and limits himself to the knowledge he has gleaned directly from his own experience or, in other words, the information he has gathered with his own senses.

Gosson's investment in experience further permits or, rather, forces him to acknowledge complexity and allow for exceptions, critical functions that the methodology of

¹⁴ Gosson himself appears to acknowledge the shift in perspective in this appeal to Augustine from *The Trumpet of Warre*: "Feare that which the almightie threatens, and love that which the almightie promises, & the whole world shall become so base and contemptible in your eyes, that you shall neither love nor feare that which the worlde promises or threatens" (C8^r).

Playes Confuted will preclude. The kind of truth that Gosson's experience reveals to him is a qualified truth, a truth the speaking of which requires subordinate clauses. It leads him to concede that

as some of the Players are farre from abuse: so some of their Playes are without rebuke: which are as easily remembred as quickly reckoned. The twoo prose Bookes plaied at the Belsavage, where you shall finde never a woorde without wit, never a line without pith, never a letter placed in vaine. The Jew & Ptolome, showne at the Bull, the one representing the greedinesse of worldly chusers, and bloody mindes of Userers: The other very lively discribing how seditious estates, with their own devises, false friendes, with their owne swoordes, & rebellious co[m]mons in their owne snares are overthrowne: neither with Amorous gesture wounding the eye: nor with slovenly talke hurting the eares of the chaste hearers. The Black Smiths daughter, & Catilins conspiracies usually brought in to the Theater These Playes are good playes and sweete playes, and of al playes the best playes and most to be liked, woorthy to bee sounge of the Muses, or set out with the cunning of Roscius himself, yet are they not fit for every mans dyet: neither ought they commonly to bee shoven.

(C6^v-C7^v)

To be sure, the list of exceptions presented here is a short one and includes one of Gosson's own plays ("Catilins conspiracies"), but it is quite long enough to prevent Gosson's case against popular drama from becoming absolute. His investment in experience grants *The Schoole of Abuse* a degree of subtlety that rescues it from dogmatism and keeps it this side of *Playes Confuted* and the rest of the antitheatrical corpus. The depth of that investment is made clear at the end of this passage, where Gosson qualifies his qualification with a qualification of its own, reminding his readers that even the "best playes" can be abused. Within the critical domain that Gosson plots out in *The Schoole of Abuse*, experience becomes the sine qua non of criticism itself.

Unfortunately for Gosson, the benefits of experience in the critical domain reflect a commensurate cost in the social domain. Like Hamlet's "Ay, madam, it is common," Gosson's "common experience" speaks double, and he exposes this doubleness by

attributing both his critical authority and his “shame” to his uncomfortable if privileged interstitial position between London and Oxford:

They that never went out of the cha[m]pions in Brabant, will hardly conceive what rockes are in Germany. And they that never goe out of their houses, for regard of their credit, nor steppe from the universitye for love of knowledge, seeing but slender offences & small abuses within their owne walles, wil never beleeeve [that] such rockes are abroad, nor such horrible monsters in playing places. But as (I speake the one to my comforte, the other to my shame, and remember both with a sorrowfull hart) I was first instructed in the university, after drawne like a novice to these abuses: so wil I shew you what I see, & informe you what I reade of such affaires.

(B3')

Gosson regretfully yet authoritatively possesses the experience that those bound to the university by “love of knowledge” lack, and it allows him to see, and to show his readers, the “horrible monsters” of the theater. The passage suggests, however, that it was not a reciprocal lack of “love of knowledge” that provided Gosson with access to this experience. Rather, as the passive phrase of the last sentence reveals, he “was ... drawn” to it against his wishes and to his shame. As if setting the stage for Jurgen Habermas’s idea of the third estate turning its inevitable private status into a source of unprecedented power through the formation of a public sphere founded upon rational debate, Gosson turns his socially stigmatized experience in the theater into a unique form of authority. It is an intriguing comparison, and one that emerges in histories of criticism with some regularity,¹⁵ yet it is limited here specifically by Gosson’s hopeful dedication to Sidney, by his appeal to civic authority, and by the fact that Gosson, like a critical iteration of the prodigal son, wears his badge like a stain. His experience as a dramatist both authorizes him as a critic of popular

¹⁵ See, for instance, Hohendahl, Eagleton, and Burt.

drama and opens him up to the charge of hypocrisy so often leveled at him;¹⁶ indeed, his redemption of his experience as a critical principle serves in part as a means of defending against that charge. Nevertheless, in recognition of the Edenic capacity of experience both to authorize and to corrupt, he vigilantly guards against further sullyng his own reputation or debasing the minds of his readers by going too far or straying from the topic at hand: “I intende not to shewe you al that I see, nor halfe that I heare of these abuses, lest you iudge me more wilfill to teach them, then willing to forbid them” (C3^v). Like a bad play, bad criticism indulges excess to the extent that a negative example achieves the effect of a positive one, inviting the reader to participate in rather than shun its vices. With this suggestion, Gosson appears unwittingly to acknowledge the affinity between poetry and criticism, literary art and its judgment, that makes purely antipoetic or antitheatrical criticism a self-incriminating – not to mention self-defeating – enterprise.

All of this points to the fact that it is not simply experience that Gosson makes the sine qua non of criticism but rather a particular kind of experience. “They that never went out of the cha[m]pions in Brabant” have, for all of their parochialism, nevertheless directly experienced the broad and beautiful expanses of the Low Countries. Yet the wildflowers of Belgium teach us nothing about the rocks of Germany. Good teaches us nothing about evil; beauty, nothing about ugliness; proper use, nothing about abuse. For Gosson, as for Nashe after him, truly knowing English poetry means knowing it at its worst, knowing the full extent of its abuse, knowing the full scope of the moral and social effects of that abuse, and possessing this knowledge from direct experience. It is an epistemology that recalls Milton and the idea expressed so memorably in the *Areopagitica* that “[i]t was from out the rind of

¹⁶ See, for instance, the Latin preface to *Phialo*: “Auide sibi hoc homines famelici arripiunt, me qui Poetas reprehendo, Poetae partes suscepisse, & Dictasse iis versus quos in Theatris recitarunt [Hungry men greedily seize upon the fact that I, who reprehend the poets, have undertaken the part of the poets and composed verses which they have read aloud in the theaters]” (5^v-6^r).

one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evil, as two twins cleaving together, leaped forth into the world” (728) and that the doom of our first parents was to know good only by knowing evil. Yet the comparison benefits us most in the difference it reveals between Milton, who contends that the direct experience of evil reveals and constitutes virtue, and Gosson, who contends that the direct experience of evil reveals and constitutes evil.

As a critical framework, common experience eliminates the discursive boundaries restricting critical discourse to the page or stage. It leads Gosson off of both and into the theater audience in *The Schoole of Abuse* – even out of the theater and into the streets of London – raising what will prove to be a central question in the invention of the critic, a question first glimpsed in Gosson’s considerations of critical propriety: Where exactly do the bounds of criticism lie? In empirically tracing the network of influence emanating from poetry and drama, how far is too far?

Guided by experience and confident in the broad social relevance of poetry and drama, albeit for altogether unfavorable reasons, Gosson enriches both his argument and his ethos in *The School of Abuse* by borrowing matter and manner from other fields of discourse. The pamphlet would appear to bear out, in a rather heavy-handed way, a Bakhtinian view of living language as inherently social and dialogic,¹⁷ yet from another perspective it simply lives out Phialo’s recommendation that Philotimo imitate other kinds of work – physicians, fencers, surgeons, smiths – when undertaking the censure of a friend (C4^v). Either way, Gosson establishes the relevance of criticism itself by reciprocally bringing the judgment of poetry and drama to bear upon the other disciplines he draws upon. The same critical

¹⁷ See Bakhtin, e.g., “The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance, it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue. After all, the utterance arises out of this dialogue as a continuation of it and as a rejoinder to it – it does not approach the object from the sidelines” (276-7).

tendency that will later lead Samuel Daniel and Ben Jonson to advance broad-based arguments on historiography and natural law in their criticism, and, in a general sense, the same tendency that had led the rhetoricians of ancient Greece to legitimize their novel practice by drawing upon new scientific principles (Ford 161-87), leads Gosson to compare London to the Rome of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* in a passage that might have been plucked from a cony-catching pamphlet: "In our assemblies at playes in London, you shall see suche heaving, and shooving, suche ytching and shouldring, too sittte by women ... Suche ticking, such toying, such smiling, such winking, and such ma[n]ning them home, when the sportes are ended, that it is a right Comedie, to marke behaviour" (C1^v).¹⁸ Beyond observing, as Emily Dickinson has it, that "The show is not the show, / But they that go,"¹⁹ by tantalizing his readership with the off-stage spectacle, Gosson once again reveals the affinity between poetry and criticism, between the spectacle and its observation and judgment, that short-circuits antipoetic criticism.

Gosson goes on to explain that prostitutes who have been without business all week head to the theater on the Sabbath in search of clients (C2ⁱ). In impressive and, just as he fears, suspicious detail, he describes their practice of leading clients to nearby inns to conduct business (C2^v). This leads to a digression worthy of a city comedy on pimps running brothels under the guise of music schools (C3ⁱ). We seem by this point to have strayed far from criticism, yet Gosson's empirical framework mandates the extension of the

¹⁸ I am not entirely persuaded by S. P. Zitner's claim that Gosson's proximity to his source in this passage calls into question the validity of his account. Whether Gosson actually gathered these details from experience – which is, given his biography, entirely likely – seems to matter less, at least to the present study, than the fact that he presents them as if he had. Zitner's argument rests on Ringer's claim, addressed below, that Gosson may have been paid by London authorities for his pamphlet, a claim that has been called into question by Kinney (*Markets* 17 n. 40).

¹⁹ *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), p. 532.

critical domain by implicating the theater as part of a wider web of abuses. What looks like a music school serves in practice as a brothel; what looks like a theater serves in practice as an illicit rendezvous. Common experience brooks no distinction between the dangerous indulgence of the passions occurring onstage and that occurring offstage, or between the abuses contained within the theater walls and those that bleed out into the city streets. It is precisely that bleeding-out with which Gosson illustrates the threat posed to the commonwealth by poetic abuses. And it is precisely by revealing and commenting upon that bleeding-out that Gosson establishes for the critic a meaningful role within the commonwealth. Poetry and drama matter; criticism matters because it shows us how.

Later in the pamphlet, Gosson moves on to other abuses, casting his critical eye upon fencers, dicers, dancers, tumblers, carders, and bowlers (D3^vff.). He continues to argue from common experience and social relevance, claiming, for instance, that the wives and children of bowlers often go to bed hungry (D4^r). Whether Gosson considers himself entitled as a critic of popular poetry and drama to address social abuses more broadly or entitled as a social critic to address poetic abuses is, of course, an anachronistic question that reveals the functional utility and ideological potency of those modern terms and distinctions – “critic,” “social,” “poetic” – simultaneously at stake in and absent from *The Schoole of Abuse*. If Gosson eludes such categorization, he nevertheless manages to illustrate several key features of the figure he considers best suited to the judgment of poetry and drama, a figure whom over the next century will with increasing regularity be called the “critic.”

For Gosson, this figure must possess learning, which, among other benefits, permits the critic to engage the champions of poetry and drama in their own terms. A courtier without learning, we learn from *Phialo*, is but “the shape of a man stuf with straw” (D5^r), and indeed Gosson presents his own classical learning in part as a critical shibboleth. Yet he

engages classical sources from a particular perspective, a perspective in line with common experience, consistently preferring examples over precepts and the practical over the abstruse. In Gosson's hands, even Plato becomes a pragmatist, banishing poets as "unprofitable members" without mention of their metaphysical offenses (A3^{r-v}, A4^r).

Even more than learning, which in Gosson's case in particular has been exhaustively addressed elsewhere,²⁰ the English critic must possess direct experience of poetry and drama as they exist in England's little corner of the fallen world. This experience allows the critic to maintain a social context in critical debate; to argue from practical, and often civic, ends; to undermine the hypostatizing of the apologists; and to extend the domain of criticism considerably. Meanwhile, it also forces the critic to acknowledge complexity and difference and to avoid dogmatic absolutes. Experience giveth and taketh away, legitimating the critic's judgments even as it exposes their limitations and granting the critic the vision to spot social abuses for the benefit of the commonwealth even as that vision compromises his reputation in the eyes of the commonwealth.

The significance of these features transcends Gosson himself. Common experience, presented here for the first time in the history of English criticism as a basis for critical discourse and a marker for the world of context in which that discourse is to be understood, forges an idea of the critic that will gain even greater definition from Sidney's deliberate and diametric opposition to it in the *Defence of Poesy*. Gosson's ownership of that idea, however, is partial at best. He is as much an exponent as a proponent of common experience. Though it is perhaps unrealistic and, more to the point, unnecessary to claim that Gosson was the first of a new breed of modern English critics, *The Schoole of Abuse* deserves to be acknowledged as a key moment in the development of a new and distinctively modern critical

²⁰ See Ringler, *Gosson*, pp. 100-15, and the annotated edition of *The Schoole of Abuse* in Kinney, *Markets*, pp. 69-120.

perspective laying claim to the world of experience. That prominent inheritors of this perspective such as Thomas Nashe, Samuel Daniel, and Ben Jonson would be loath to claim Gosson as an ally, much less as a model, should make an investigation of their sympathies as critics more interesting, not less.

IV. Critical Authority

Shortly after *The School of Abuse* appeared in the summer of 1579, printer Hugh Singleton, who would go on to publish *The Shepheardes Calender* in December of that year, presented English readers with a different strain of criticism in John Stubbs' *A Gaping Gulf*. This octavo took as its target the proposed marriage between Elizabeth I and the Catholic Duke d'Alençon and, like *The Schoole of Abuse*, sought to serve the commonwealth through open censure and the incitement of public debate.²¹ For his efforts, Stubbs lost his right hand. Earlier in the decade, John Field and Thomas Wilcox had been imprisoned for their criticism of the Elizabethan Settlement in the anonymous *Admonition to Parliament* (1572). Thomas Cartwright's criticism of the structure of the Elizabethan church in his lectures on the Acts of the Apostles, and proposal of a new distribution of ecclesiastical authority that would come to be called "Presbyterianism," cost him his position at Cambridge. It was a decade in which the risks of criticism, in the broadest sense of the word, had been made abundantly clear and in which debates over political and ecclesiastical authority were forcefully, if not conclusively, resolved. These historical circumstances, added to the relative novelty and instability of the idea of the modern literary critic, produce in Gosson palpable anxiety over assuming critical authority and lead him to consider carefully and self-consciously the role of the critic and the metacritical argument given off by his pamphlet.

²¹ See Natalie Mears, "Counsel, Public Debate, and Queenship: John Stubbs's 'The Discoverie of a Gaping Gulf,' 1579," *The Historical Journal* 44.3 (September 2001), 629-50.

Although collectively the *The Schoole of Abuse* might be considered a speech act through which Gosson leads the dance and exerts his critical authority, the form of the pamphlet betrays a degree of uncertainty about the scope of that authority. Gosson frames his argument with epistles to Philip Sidney and Sir Richard Pipe, Lord Mayor of London. In each, he undercuts his own authority by appealing to greater authorities, the one exerted chiefly through reputation and the other through civic office, in hopes that they will help him see his project through. These bookends threaten to digest the treatise they contain in the idea that the critic is only as influential as the patronage he secures and the policy he successfully advances. At best, Gosson can hope for his criticism to have an indirect influence: “And I hope that Augustus (I meane such as are in authoritie) will beare with me, because I touch that which is needefull to bee shoven” (E6^v). The short letter “To the Gentlewomen Citizens of London” with which Gosson concludes his pamphlet, and in which he rhetorically arms himself not with critical standards but with the threat of a besmirched reputation (F2^r), effectively subordinates his critical authority to the power exerted by the discretionary spending of these “vertuous Dames” (F1^v). He leaves the primary argument of abuse behind, satisfied to baldly implore his readers for the sake of their “Credite” (F1^v) to “keepe home, & shun all occasion of ill speech” (F4^r).

The expression of this anxiety over the scope of critical authority is not limited to the form and paratexts of the pamphlet. Within the treatise itself, it emerges in repeated disavowals of critical authority. We have seen this already in Gosson’s judgment of contemporary poets, the act, after all, by which critics exercise whatever share of authority they possesses and which Gosson performs obliquely through a kind of deferential projection: “But if they that are in authoritie, and have the sworde in their handes to cut off abuses, shoulde call an acco[m]pt to see how many Chirons, Terpandri, and Homers are

heere, they might cast the summe without pen, or counters” (B1^{r-v}). Poetry must be called to account; Gosson expresses no confusion about the need for critical authority. Yet the consideration of who, exactly, should judge poetry forces him into the awkward rhetorical position of performing the very judgment he simultaneously delegates to “they that are in authoritie.” If the sword-wielding authorities should look into the matter, they will find exactly what Gosson finds, namely, that English poets fall far short of the ideal poets presented as paradigms by ancient critics. The difference, Gosson suggests, is that they will be able to do something about it. Unlike him, they do not lack the ability to “bridle ... tongues” (7^v). In 1579, the readiest model of authority available to Gosson was state authority, which had bridled the tongues of Stubbs and Cartwright, and he cannot yet see past this model to other possibilities. The idea of a critic who autonomously exerts a direct and non-coercive influence upon English literature and culture remains at some level unimaginable to him, and he accordingly plays the critic in a tentative vein: “But to leave the scepter to Iupiter ... I will beare a lowe sayle, and rowe neere the shore, least I chaunce to bee carried beyonde my reache, or runne a ground in those Coasts which I never knewe. My onely endeavour shalbe to shew you that in a rough cast, which I see in a cloude, loking through my fingers” (A6^{r-v}).

Ironically enough, it is in these moments, when Gosson makes a gesture of refusing the critical crown, that he reveals the most about his idea of the critic. His fear of being carried beyond his reach or running aground in foreign coasts speaks to the tendency of critical considerations grounded in common experience to trespass into other fields of discourse. The Gossonian critic inevitably finds himself talking about something more than poetry, and Gosson’s resistance to that fact only serves to emphasize it. Ultimately, for all of the didactic moralizing of subsequent defenders of poetry, it is the exhibition of this

tendency of criticism to reveal the relevance of poetry to a wide range of social, political, and other interests that establishes the cultural significance of poetry and criticism alike.

Perhaps the most striking instance of this phenomenon in Gosson's primary argument occurs when he marshals forth one of the most ancient criticisms of poetry, drama, and song in the idea that these arts compromise the commonwealth by effeminizing its men and threatening to upturn the dominant gender hierarchy. This concern issues forth from the most trusted weapon in the arsenal of the opponents of poetry: Plato's putative banishment of the poets from his ideal polis "as effeminate writers, unprofitable members, and utter enemies to vertue" (A3^f). In abstraction, or nested within the cultural context of a loosely grasped classical world, this trope serves Gosson well. He cites Plutarch's criticism of the abuse of ancient music in the "sweete consortes" of the theater, "which rather effeminate the minde" (B3^f).²² Drawing on the *Symposiacs*, he urges his readers to shun the theater as Clitomachus, "the wrestler geuen altogether to manly exercise," shunned even the discussion of love (B4^{f-v}). In a liberal reading of Sallust, Gosson finds Caius Marius attributing his martial prowess to never having learned to read Greek, "either that he thought it too farre a journey to fetche learning beyonde the fieldes, or because he doubted the abuses of those Schooles, where Poets were ever the head Maisters" (A5^v).²³ The

²² Compare Plutarch from *De Musica*: "The ancients made use of it for its worth, as they did all other beneficial sciences. But our men of art, contemning its ancient majesty, instead of that manly, grave, heaven-born music, so acceptable to the Gods, have brought into the theatres a sort of effeminate musical tattling, mere sound without substance; which Plato utterly rejects in the third book of his commonwealth, refusing the Lydian harmony as fit only for lamentations" (1.114).

²³ Compare the speech of C. Marius to the senate in the *Jugurthine War* 85.30-2: "Non sunt composita verba mea: parvi id facio. Ipsa se virtus satis ostendit. Illis artificio opus est, ut turpia facta oratione tegant. Neque litteras Graecas didici: parum placebat eas discere, quippe quae ad virtutem doctoribus nihil profuerant [My speech, they say, is inelegant; but that I have ever thought of little importance. Worth sufficiently displays itself; it is for my detractors to use studied language, that they may palliate base conduct by plausible words. Nor have I learned Greek; for I had no wish to acquire a tongue that adds nothing to the valor of those who teach it (tr. John Selby Watson)]." See also Plutarch's explanation in the *Lives*: "[Caius Marius] is said never to have either studied Greek, or to have use of

historical instance of the subjugated Greeks suggests that poetry has the power not only to effeminate an entire culture but also, like high levels of radiation, to infect the language of that culture with a lingering, effeminizing taint. With the emergence of print culture and the vernacular emphasis of the Elizabethan Settlement elevating the dignity of the English language to new heights in the second half of the sixteenth century, the threat posed by poetry could hardly be more grave.

Yet even this time-tested argument, approved by the authority of ancient Greece and Rome, becomes a source of anxiety when Gosson shifts from the classical world to England, its native origins, and its present state. Continuing to build his case for the effeminizing effect of poetry, he turns to Cassius Dio's account of England and the virtues of its ancient inhabitants:

Consider with thy selfe (gentle Reader) the olde discipline of Englande, mark what we were before, & what we are now ... Dion sayth, that english men could suffer watching and labor, hunger & thirst, and beare of al stormes w[ith] hed and shoulders, they used slender weapons, went naked, and were good soldiours, they fed vppon rootes and barks of trees, they would stand vp to the chin many dayes in marishes without victualles: and they had a kind of sustenance in time of neede, of which if they had take[n] but the quantitie of a beane, or the weight of a pease, they did neyther gape after meate, nor long for the cuppe, a great while after. The men in valure not yeelding to Scithia, the women in courage passing the Amazons. The exercise of both was shootyng and darting, running and wrestling, and trying such maisteries, as eyther consisted in swiftnesse of feete, agilitie of body, strength of armes, or Martiall discipline. But the exercise that is nowe among vs, is banqueting, playing, pipyng, and dauncing, and all suche delightes as may win vs to pleasure, or rocke vs a sleepe.

(B8^{f-v})²⁴

that language in any matter of consequence; thinking it ridiculous to bestow time in that learning, the teachers of which were little better than slaves. So after his second triumph, when at the dedication of a temple he presented some shows after the Greek fashion, coming into the theatre, he only sat down and immediately departed" (1.549).

²⁴ Gosson's source is Book 77 of Dio's Roman History.

Gosson here makes a clear distinction between virile ancient England and “playing, pipying, and dauncing” modern England. Yet in comparing the women of the former to the Amazons, he concedes a point that compromises the persuasiveness of that distinction. The threat of effeminization loses some of its coherence in the context of a culture with such clearly different ideas about gender roles. By invoking this trope in the context of ancient England, Gosson plays into a dilemma faced by sixteenth-century historiography in general, which sought to replace the mythical legacy of England in figures such as Brute and Arthur with verifiable ancient roots, yet recoiled at the savagery and gender trouble they found in Roman accounts of the ancient Britons. As Jodi Mikalachki has shown in her study of the role of gender in nation formation, historiographers like Holinshed and Camden attempted to establish a masculine, Roman vision of native England that native England would not support.²⁵ Gosson’s encounter with this dilemma, though merely foreshadowed here in the Amazonian courage of the ancient English women, comes to a head in his discussion of Boadicea, queen of the native Iceni of East Anglia.

Drawing once again upon Dio, Gosson considerably complicates his effeminization argument by impugning the masculinity of Nero’s army through the famous speech of Queen Boadicea recorded there:

Bundica a notable woman and a Queene of Englande, that tyme that Nero was Emperour of Rome, having some of the Romans in garrison heere against her, in an Oration which she made to her subiects, seemed utterly to contemne their force, and laugh at their folly. For shee accounted them unwoorthy the name of men, or title of Souldiers, because they were smoothly appareled, soft lodged, daintely feasted, bathed in warme waters, rubbed with sweet oyntments, strewd with fine poulders, wine swillers, singers, Dauncers, and Players.

(C5^{r-v})

²⁵ See Mikalachki, pp. 2, 4, 8-10, *passim*.

The threat of effeminization obtains in the classical world that Gosson represents in his appeals to Plutarch and Sallust, a world in which manly wrestlers and warriors exhibit an almost paranoid fear of engaging in any potentially effeminizing activity. Yet here, in ancient England, where a “notable” and, given her role as queen, exemplary woman calls out the ancient Romans as “unwoorthy the name of men,” that threat suffers from the collapse of the distinction upon which it is based.²⁶ Boadicea’s subsequent routing and effective out-manning of the Roman army completes the inversion begun in this passage. As a critic, Gosson here realizes his fears of running aground in unfamiliar coasts by innocently stumbling into matters of historiography, politics, and sexuality seemingly remote from the concerns of literary criticism.

Gosson immediately follows his praise of Boadicea with a passage of even more lavish praise of the present queen, “in vertue excellent, in power mightie, in glorie renowned, in governmente politicke” (C5^v). Whether he has introduced Queen Boadicea to acknowledge, and by acknowledging to inoculate, the implications of his earlier reference to England’s ancient Amazons or the full implications of both references occur to him only now, his subsequent invocation of Queen Elizabeth I confirms and attempts to control the comparison he has invited. Sixteenth-century historiography would soon render Boadicea into a symbol for ancient English savagery, an extension of which was gender inversion (Mikalachki, 12-13, 121-2), and passages of Dio’s account of the ancient queen, which Gosson strategically omits from his own account, would nevertheless have made the basis for this reading perfectly clear to him. His praise of Elizabeth I, which on the surface appears to provide a rather clumsy segue into a philippic on the widespread lack of respect

²⁶ This passage deserves to be considered in light of Mikalachki’s study, especially given that it predates many of the discussions of Boadicea examined there; presents a feminized Rome; and, by casting the ancient queen in an unequivocally positive light, suggests that the reception of this figure may be more varied and complex than at first it seems.

for sumptuary laws, more effectively registers Gosson's anxious awareness of the delicate situation he has gotten himself into. Rehearsing the critical chestnut about the tendency of poetry to make women of men leads him, just as soon as he attempts to translate it from the classical world to England, into an uncomfortable rhetorical position from which he must carefully defend against potentially damning historical, political, and sexual implications.

What this anxiety ultimately demonstrates is the difficulty of compartmentalizing criticism as Gosson practices it. The principle of common experience incorporates into criticism other fields of discourse whether the critic wills it or not, whether Gosson deliberately leads the dance out of the theater or rather finds himself drawn out just as he claims to have been drawn in. In the decades following *The Schoole of Abuse*, as anxiety gives way to ambition, critics increasingly foster this dialectical potential as a means of amplifying the resonance of criticism in English culture, elevating its seriousness as a literary form, and establishing critical authority. The fifth chapter of this dissertation addresses this potential at length and demonstrates how it permitted Ben Jonson and other English critics to bring their critical authority to bear upon the early modern debate over decay. Gosson, on the contrary, disavows critical authority with increasing vehemence in his subsequent works. By the time of the *Apology*, he will claim to have no authority at all: "it shal be enough for me which have no authority to give them a plaister, to launce the sore friendly & let it runne, that in process of time it may heal of itself" (L7^v). And by the time of *Playes Confuted*, he will claim that no man's reason can stand for authority in cases of conscience (C5^v). Critical authority cuts both ways, as Sidney's response, which continues even now to occlude and muffle Gosson, makes clear. The authority that Gosson helps to secure for the modern English critic by revealing, willy-nilly, the relevance of poetry and criticism to other areas of culture benefits his opponents' arguments just as much as it benefits his own. Perhaps it is

for this reason that we find him dismissing that authority in subsequent works and then, in an ultimate act of dismissal, surrendering it entirely.

V. “The Schoole which I builde”

Erving Goffman has argued that those individuals to whom it falls to represent the face or “front” of a new or radically reformed social task will likely find themselves adapting one of a set of pre-existing fronts to new ends (27). Similar arguments have been made with regard to new genres, including Claudio Guillén’s claim that new literary works must be perceived and judged “within the coordinates of an available critical scheme” (385). That this rule applies to criticism as well is but one of many ironies occasioned by metacritical inquiry. In accordance with both the sociological and critical iterations of this theory, Arthur Kinney has observed Gosson playing the role of critic by invoking the more familiar roles of teacher, doctor, and military leader.²⁷ The title of the “Schoole of Abuse” introduces the first and most important of these adjunct roles, that of teacher or schoolmaster. In terms of his primary argument, the title implies that it falls to Gosson as schoolmaster both to educate his readers on the topic of abuse and to educate or reform abuse itself. He begins his performance of this role as early as the dedicatory epistle to Sidney, inviting his dedicatee to “enter the Schoole doore” and sit in on his class (5^{r-v}). At the other end of the pamphlet, he concludes by dismissing class, leaving us with the voice of the schoolmaster echoing in our ears (E5^v). In between, he returns to the role repeatedly.

The metacritical significance of this role, which literally and figuratively contains the pamphlet, becomes clear when we consider the expression it gives off. For in addition to expressing to the reader the nature of the argument contained within the pamphlet, the metaphors of school and schoolmaster also serve to express something about the idea of the

²⁷ See Kinney, “Argumentation,” *Markets*, pp. 47-51.

critic who authored it. In adopting a fictional role to speak through, Gosson draws upon the classical tradition of declamation (*declamatio*), the step succeeding an introductory course in composition (*progymnasmata*) when students were first given the opportunity to put their training into practice.²⁸ Students were provided with a hypothetical case to argue from one of two plausible sides or both (*in utrumque parte*) and required to compose (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio*), memorize (*memoria*), and deliver (*pronuntiatio*) a declamation on it. Declamations, as our primary example of the form in the writings of Seneca the Elder demonstrate, were traditionally divided between elementary cases derived from history or fiction (*suasoriae*) and more complex and advanced cases geared toward the forensic oratory of the courtroom (*controversiae*). Each required the speaker to adopt not just a given argument but often a given persona as well (*prosopopeia*), whether that of the courtroom lawyer or that of Agamemnon, as in one of Seneca's *suasoriae*. Quintilian stresses in the third book of the *Institutio* the great educational benefit of declamatory prosopopoeia, of having “on one occasion to impersonate Caesar, on another Cicero or Cato” (3.8.49), for orators, poets, and historians alike. Elsewhere he addresses the potentially distracting pleasure that young students take in the more fantastical roles available (2.10.5). Prosopopoeia, or, in Puttenham's English, “the counterfeit impersonation” (324), served to make declamation enjoyable – or, to borrow Gosson's term, “pleasaunt” – for speaker and auditor alike.

Ultimately, it was the overindulgence of this pleasure that caused declamation to shift from rhetorical exercise to popular dramatic entertainment and to fall from favor in Rome (Rhodes 611). In the early modern period, the form returned to glory with Erasmus's edition of Seneca (1515, 1529).²⁹ The resurgence of declamatory prosopopoeia with all of its

²⁸ For an overview of the role of declamation in Roman oratory, see Kennedy, *Art*, pp. 91-7 and 312-22. On the reception of this tradition in the Renaissance, see Poel.

pleasantness appears nowhere more clearly than in Erasmus's own *Praise of Folly*, and Roger Ascham signals the revival of declamation as a pedagogical resource in England by listing it in his *Schoolmaster* as one of the six best ways to learn languages and increase eloquence (33⁵). In 1596, Alexander Silvayn's *The Orator* appeared in an English translation by Anthony Munday, featuring, as its title indicates, "a hundred severall discourses, in forme of declamations" both borrowed and original, classical and contemporary. Silvayn's readers would have known by 1596 what to expect from the form, as would the readers of the translation of Charles Estienne's paradoxical declamations issued three years earlier. Beyond prosopopoeia, or the fashioning of roles (*fictio personae* in the rhetorical manuals), they could expect arguments on moral cases that could plausibly be argued from more than one side, arguments that may therefore appear paradoxical or, in the words of Anthony Munday, Estienne's translator as well as Silvayn's, "against common opinion" (TP). They would have expected, as Marc van der Poel has it, "not a plain text in which abstract truths are formulated for an audience expected to absorb the text uncritically, but a complicated text, in which the writer puts forward and discusses ... more than one point of view" (478).

Of course, Gosson does not openly present *The Schoole of Abuse* as an argument "in the form of a declamation." Yet in opposing "common opinion" and fashioning a persona through which to express his moral argument, he draws upon the tradition of that form and thus gives off a particular expression of the idea of the critic. The pleasantness of that expression, a quality associated with declamatory prosopopoeia since Quintilian at the latest, comes through in the playfulness with which Gosson, as schoolmaster, invites us in and ushers us out of his school. Moreover, the complexity that inheres in the form, in its tendency to acknowledge a multiplicity of perspectives, is reflected in Gosson's critical

²⁹ The *suasoriae* and *controversiae* were attributed to Seneca the Younger. See Rhodes, p. 612.

ambivalence, empirical concessions, humility, and anxiety over critical authority. The role of the schoolmaster and the form of the declamation lend themselves to the expression of these qualities. On the one hand, they allow Gosson paradoxically to assert the importance of his argument through the humility of his persona: “The Schoole which I builde, is narrowe, and at the firste blushe appeareth but a doggehole; yet small Cloudes carie water” (3^v-4^r). On the other, they allow him to delimit his critical authority with recourse to metaphor, whether that of the cramped classroom (“I woulde reade you a Lecture of these abuses, but my Schoole so increaseth, that I cannot touch all” [D4^r]) or that of classroom decorum (“I shoulde tel tales out of the Schoole, and bee Ferruled for my faulte, or hyssed at for a blab, yf I layde al the orders open before your eyes” [A6^v]). In the schoolmaster, whose authority and social relevance are greater than they seem yet not too great to raise the notice or stir the envy of Augustus, Gosson finds a suitable front for the modern English critic.

Though it is precisely the familiarity of the schoolmaster that Gosson seizes upon in formulating his idea of the critic, he takes pains to distinguish his performance of this persona from some of its more pejorative iterations. His schoolmaster is neither Overbury’s “Pedant,” who “never had meaning in his life, for he travelled onely for words” (E7^v), nor his “Meere Scholler,” who “speakes Latine better than his Mother tongue ... is a stranger in no part of the world, but his owne Countrey,” and “gives directions for Husbandry from *Virgils Georgicks*” (G4^v-G5^r). Gosson’s investment in common experience makes him hostile toward learning that takes learning as its end:

If it be the dutie of every man in a common wealth, one way or other to bestirre his stumpes, I ca[n]not but blame those lither co[n]templators very much, which sit concluding of Sillogismes in a corner, which in a close study in the University coope themselves up fortie yeres together studying all thinges, and professe nothing.

(E2^{v-r})

While it would perhaps be going too far to draw from this passage an alternative explanation for Gosson's departure from Oxford, he clearly opposes himself to the type of sheltered and selfish university scholar he describes here and had likely encountered first-hand. Gosson's schoolmaster is rather a public persona and one who, like Gosson himself, attributes his learning to common experience as well as humanist education. Like Miso, whom Anacharsis declared "the onely wise man that ever he saw" (E3^v), Gosson demonstrates a dutiful commitment to family and community. He shares the conviction of the civic humanist that virtue lies in use – that "sta[n]ding streames geather filth; [while] flowing rivers, are ever sweet" (E3^v) – and that learning must serve the commonwealth (A4^v) or at least seek to influence policy indirectly, as Morus advises Hythlodæus. Gosson thus stands at the front end of a decisive anti-pedantic strain in the invention of the critic in England, which was of sufficient influence, as I demonstrate at length in the third chapter below, to draw into its current would-be pedants such as George Puttenham and Gabriel Harvey.

Utopia is perhaps a fitting place to conclude this study of Gosson's idea of the critic, for there we find, if not an ideal world, an ideal model of the political function of indirect speech, of the tradition, going back at least to the prophet Nathan, of influencing policy indirectly – where "indirectly" takes on its rhetorical sense – through the use of fiction. "For all I know," conjectures Hythlodæus, "it may be the business of a philosopher to recite lies, but it isn't mine" (More 26). Gosson, in his invocation of the fiction of the schoolmaster, once again reveals the affinity between criticism and its object, an affinity that lies at the very roots of western critical tradition.³⁰ If the critical function of the schoolmaster is to enable Gosson to affect civic and political realities indirectly with fiction – to temper his censure with a "shadowe," as Phialo advises Philotimo (C4^v) – its metacritical effect is rather to

³⁰ Andrew Ford has examined the emergence of formal traditions of poetry and criticism alike from a common source in the ancient Greek symposia. See Ford, pp. 25-45.

deprive itself of its own fictional status, to distill the “schoolmaster,” along with all of the other various tropes and *personae* that Gosson incorporates into his idea of the critic, into a coherent, cohesive, and utterly non-fictional social role.

VI. The Response

Lincoln’s Inn clerk Thomas Lodge sought to publish his response to *The Schoole of Abuse* toward the end of 1579, but, as he later explains in the front matter of *An Alarum Against Usurers* (1584), “by reason of the slendernes of the subject (because it was in defe[n]ce of plaies & play makers) the godly & reverent that had to deale in the cause, misliking it, forbad the publishing” (A3^v). A small private printing of what Lodge aptly calls “unperfect” copies nevertheless proved sufficient to allow Gosson to gain access to a copy (and even for two copies to remain to us today).³¹ Though it seems a specious reason for suppression, Lodge’s assessment of the inherent “slendernes” of the “defe[n]ce of plaies & play makers” as a subject sheds light on the casual tone of the pamphlet, which Gosson’s scholastically rigorous response in *Playes Confuted* was to cast in unflattering relief. So too does Lodge’s slightly incriminating admission that he writes in part to reveal Gosson’s error and in part to fulfill a promise (Smith 1.64). One does not get the sense from the pamphlet of an indignant poet stirred to action, least of all in its final pages, where Lodge disavows the role of the critic more directly and convincingly than Gosson had. What one does get, in any event, is a reaffirmation of the sense first expressed by the publication of *The Schoole of Abuse* and by Gosson’s account of the players’ search that the socio-literary conditions of late-1570s London produced a collective need for critical authority.

The pamphlet finds Lodge at the very outset of one of the longest and most prolific writing careers of the Tudor-Stuart era. Influential works such as *Scylla’s Metamorphosis*

³¹ Smith reports that two copies remain, “one being in the Bodleian, the other in the Britwell Collection” (1.61).

(1589), *Rosalynde* (1590), and *A Fig for Momus* (1595) all lay in the future. Given what's to come, this first English defense of poetry, sometimes called "Honest Excuses" after Gosson's vague reference to it in the "Apologie," is rather unimpressive.³² What most inhibits its success as a rebuttal to *The Schoole of Abuse* is its misconstruction of Gosson's argument and its mishandling of the common experience upon which that argument appeared so solidly founded to its many readers. By and large, Lodge neglects the world encompassed by that phrase, and when he doesn't, we wish, for the sake of his argument, that he had. The few general references made to contemporary English drama and poetry serve only to add fuel to Gosson's fire. Lodge offers, for instance, an unfavorable comparison of the ancient Roman and modern English theaters (the English attempt less and pander more) and actually sides with Gosson on the sad state of poetry in England: "And surely, if I may speak my mind, I think we shal find but few Poets, if it were exactly wayd, what they oughte to be" (Smith 1.75) – indeed, so few, one might say, "that everie one of them may creepe through a ring, or daunce the wilde Morice in a Needles eye" (*Schoole* B⁵). Specific references are limited to passing praise of the biblical tragedies of George Buchanan (Gosson will retort in *Playes Confuted* that these are closet dramas and therefore beside the point [E5^v]) and a jab at Gosson in the form of a compliment to Robert Wilson, whose "Shorte and sweete" *Catiline* he claims to prefer to Gosson's *Catilins Conspiracies* (Smith 1.85).³³

Elsewhere, Lodge sticks to abstractions, ad hominem cheap shots, and second-hand appeals to the ancients, the church fathers, and the occasional humanist. The lion's share of these appeals Lodge borrows wholesale from the *Familiaria in Terentium Praenotamenta*, a once

³² On the title of Lodge's reply, see John Dover Wilson, "The Missing Title of Thomas Lodge's Reply to Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse*," *MLR* 3.2 (1908), 166-8.

³³ Both plays are now lost.

popular and conveniently forgotten early sixteenth-century preface to Terence written by French humanist and printer Jodocus Badius Ascensius.³⁴ William Ringler, the first, in Lodge's age or ours, to note the extent of this debt, has demonstrated through collation that much of Lodge's borrowing amounts to direct translation or close paraphrase, lending further support to the theory that the pamphlet constitutes the hasty fulfillment of a promise more than a labor of love.³⁵ Despite this practice, Lodge does not hesitate to cast humanistic aspersions at Gosson, calling him a "*homo literatus*, a man of the letter, little savoring of learning" (Smith 1.65). Evidently, Lodge was confident enough in the obscurity of his source to wager on it. He was also the first in print, though doubtless not in London, to mock Gosson's much bruited quick-change from player to player-hater: "I should blush from a Player to become an envious Preacher" (Smith 1.68). He accuses Gosson, who, by his own account, had taken a position as a private tutor in the country (*Playes* A8^v), of hiding from his critics (Smith 1.69). Perhaps his most cruel gesture is to poke fun at Gosson's abbreviated education: "you were once a scholler..." (Smith 1.85).

Theoretically, Lodge's defense hinges on allegorical interpretation and a distinction between poets *in posse* and poets *in esse* that will have to wait for Sidney for its full expression. He confesses to Gosson, "if you had reprehended the foolish fantasies of our Poets *nomine non re* which they bring forth on stage, my self wold have liked of you and allowed your labor" (Smith 1.76). Yet this is precisely what Gosson has done in *The School of Abuse* – shifted the venue of critical discourse from the world of ideas to the world of common experience – and precisely what makes his contribution to English criticism so important.

³⁴ See Ringler, "Source," pp. 165 and 170. On the *Praenotamenta*, see Weinberg, "Badius." A French translation of the text is available in Josse Bade, dit Badius (1462-1535), *Prefaces de Josse Bade*, Tr. Maurice Lebel (Louvain: Peeters, 1988).

³⁵ See Ringler, "Source."

Setting aside whatever we might conjecture about the nature of the promise Lodge made, his trouble with Gosson ultimately boils down to a disagreement over the ability of contemporary poets to realize poetic ideals, a disagreement which stems in part from his own misreading of Gosson (who concedes that poetry, in its “right use” is capable of producing “miracles” [*Schoole* A7^v-A8^r]) and which amounts to much ado about nothing, given Lodge’s own willingness to suppress those poets and playwrights who fall short: “I abhor those poets that savour of ribaldry ... I wish as zealously as the best that all abuse of playinge weare abolished” (Smith 1.76, 1.84). Both men ultimately agree that poetry is in a bad way in England and that the abuse of poetry should not be tolerated. Lodge simply has more hope in the possibility of poetic reform than Gosson, who sententiously pronounces, “where hony and gall are mixed, it will be hard to sever the one from the other” (*Schoole* A2^r).

Regardless of the extent of his personal investment in the defense of poetry as a subject for discussion, and of the extent to which his views actually differ from Gosson’s, in responding to *The Schoole of Abuse*, Lodge assumes a critical pose made significant by the simple fact that like *The Schoole of Abuse*, it represents one of the first appearances of the modern English critic in print. Taking the *Praenotamenta* as his primary source, Lodge plays the critic under a thin veil of humanistic authority. From Badius, he draws both the inspiration and the matter for a philological defense of tragedy and comedy that contributes more to his ethos than it does to the logic of his argument (Smith 1.81-2). Like the *Praenotamenta*, which provides readers of Terence with a convenient assemblage of authoritative pronouncements on the topic of poetry and drama, Lodge’s defense provides the would-be apologist with a toolbox of “honest excuses.” Badius helps Lodge considerably in building up a formidable if hodgepodge structure of defense from

proponents as varied as Marcus Fulvius, Josephus, and Erasmus. Much of the pamphlet is spent in brick-by-brick accumulation:

Marke what Campanus sayth Erasmus will make that the path waye to knowledge which you dispraise Seneca sayth that the studdie of Poets is to make children ready to the understanding of wisdom yea, though [poetry] speake for its selfe, yet her patron Tullie now shall tell her tale What made Aphricanus esteeme Ennius? Beroaldus can witnes with me that David was a poet To this objection I answer no otherwise then Horace doeth

(Smith 1.65-74)

Besides clearly opposing learning and poetry to Gosson and his argument, these rapid-fire appeals also establish the antiquity of poetry, which was for Lodge and many English critics after him from Sidney to Bacon a case-in-point defense of poetry: “for the thing, the antiquitie causeth me to allow it, so it be used as it should be” (Smith 1.84). In response to Gosson’s allusion to Cicero’s condemnation of poets in the *Tusculan Disputations* as “the fathers of lyes” (*Schoole* A3^f), Lodge makes dramatic use of Cicero’s defense of the Greek poet Archias, strategically delaying its deployment to give Gosson time to “arme [him]selfe, call [his] witts together” (Smith 1.69). For Lodge, the judgment of poetry, writ large, is a humanistic affair narrowly conceived – a matter of setting up apposite nuggets from venerable sources like so many chessmen. The liabilities of this method were not lost on Gosson.

Long before Ringler documented Lodge’s method of composition, Gosson smelled a rat. In *Playes Confuted*, he takes issue with one of Lodge’s quotations of Cicero: “*Comedia* (saith [Cicero]) is *imitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, et imago veritatis*” (Smith 1.81). Not recognizing the passage, Gosson looked into it and found a gap in Lodge’s armor:

Yonge Master Lodge thinking to sett vpon startoppes, and steale an ynche of his hight by the bare name of Cicero, allegeth from him [that] a Play is the Schoolmistresse of life; the lookinge glasse of manners; and the image of trueth. But finding him selfe too weeke in the knees to stand it out, neither

alleadging the place where Tullie saith it; nor bringing any reason of his owne, to proue it; hee flittes from this to the Etymologie of Plaies, from thence to the [musicians?], and so gallops his wisdom out of breath. It seemeth that Master Lodge saw this in Tullie with other folkes eyes, and not his owne. For to my remembrance I never read it in him, neither doe I thinke that Master Lodge can shewe it me.

(C4)

Gosson's suspicion is justified; Lodge has in fact been reading with other folks' eyes. He could have found this famous apocryphal passage in a variety of sources leading back to Donatus, who credits it to Cicero, but not in Cicero himself.³⁶ Yet what's most damaging about this revelation is not the possibility that Cicero did not actually write what Lodge claims he has written about poetry but rather the shadow it casts on Lodge's primary means of defense. Despite the fact that Lodge has ironically borrowed his mistake, along with his authority, from Badius (Ringler, "Source," 171), it nevertheless suggests that if he has been wrong here, he may well have been wrong elsewhere. With that suggestion, the structure of Lodge's defense comes tumbling down, and the distinction between men of letters and men of learning that he had used to impugn Gosson's scholarship backfires with disastrous results. In this instance, at least, Gosson comes closer than Lodge (or Badius, for that matter) to the tradition of exacting textual criticism that Badius helped to make the defining feature of humanism. Gosson shrewdly acknowledges that without his copious sources, Lodge cannot "stand it out," for he brings no "reason of his owne."

Although an argument could be made for Lodge's *ad hominem* attacks as yet another point of commonality with Badius, who in addition to publishing the early works of Erasmus also published several scholastic attacks upon Erasmus and other humanists, they represent one facet of the rhetorical feature that most clearly distinguishes Lodge's critical persona from that of Badius: namely, his garrulous, wry, and decidedly low-style vernacular, a far cry

³⁶ See Smith 1.369 n. 81.1.

from the staid Latin of the *Praenotamenta*. As Lodge strays from his chief source in this regard, his performance of the critic becomes all the more his own. Yet the applicability of that performance as a model is ultimately compromised by his own disavowal of the role of critic. He longs for a Lucilius to reform manners and opts not for “an Augustus to banish” but rather “a senator to reform” (Smith 1.76). The opposition of banishment and reform reveals the extent to which Lodge advisedly presents both a critical and a metacritical response to Gosson in his pamphlet. It immediately becomes clear, however, that Lodge does not consider himself fit for the role of reforming senator: “most blessed were we, if we might find a judge ... I leave the reformation thereof to more wise than myself” (Smith 1.76). As with Gosson, Lodge’s idea of the critic shines through most clearly in those moments when he denies the role to himself. Critic or not, he picks up on the need first expressed by *The Schoole of Abuse* for a recognized form of critical authority to pronounce judgment on the rapidly expanding body of English drama and poetry. His sense that Lucilius may come into play in the fulfillment of that need anticipates not only his own satirical writings but also the struggle, addressed at length in the fourth chapter below, of Nashe and other critics to distinguish criticism from the kind of detraction that would make Martin Marprelate infamous a decade after Lodge wrote his defense.

The case has been made, and contested, that London city officials commissioned Gosson to write *The Schoole of Abuse* in an attempt to advance their own campaign against the new public theaters by raising antitheatrical sentiment among the playgoing public.³⁷ Whether Gosson was paid for his work or not, the endurance of the question testifies to the

³⁷ See Ringler, *Gosson*, pp. 27-9, who cites, among other evidence, Anthony Munday’s reference to *The Schoole of Abuse* as “the first blast” in *A second and third blast and retrait from plaies and Theaters* (1580), an anonymous work that Ringler claims was also commissioned by the City of London. Kinney calls Ringler’s argument into question, claiming that “none of [his] arguments is sufficient to make such a notion certain” (*Markets* 17 n. 40).

social basis of Gosson's criticism and his idea of the critic. Lodge, of course, readily admits to fulfilling a promise with his work, a promise that may or may not have been secured with payment. Historically and critically, we find both writers entangled in the interests of social forces greater than themselves – forces that resist being reduced to forms of state power – and therefore quite distinct from those lither contemplators that Gosson imagines working through syllogisms in solitude. Lodge failed to publish his work; Gosson's work was reprinted in 1587. Responses to Lodge were limited to Gosson's "Apologie" and *Playes Confuted*. *The Schoole of Abuse*, however, provoked outrage and debate (*Phialo* L1^v-L2ⁿ); personal attacks (*Phialo* 5^v) and death threats (*Phialo* 3^v); a swift and anonymous (now lost) rebuttal entitled *Straunge Newes out of Affricke* (*Phialo* A1^r-A2ⁿ); a dramatic response in *The Play of Playes* (*Playes* D5^r, F1^v-F2^r, G1^r; Ringler, *Gosson*, 73); a dramatic indictment of Gosson's hypocrisy in the staging of two of his own plays, *The Comedie of Captaine Mario* and *Praise at Parting* (*Playes* A7^r); the players' search; Lodge's defense; Sidney's scorn, if we are to believe Spenser's letter to Harvey (Smith 1.89); and Sidney's *Defence of Poesy*.

This list, which excludes more delayed responses, including the great many antitheatrical works inspired by Gosson, such as Stubbes' *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583) and Prynne's *Histrio-Mastix* (1633), testifies with its breadth and variety to the discursive potential of criticism that Gosson appears to recognize working for and against him in *The Schoole of Abuse*, leading him now to the brothel and now to native England. That breath encompasses the distinction made at the outset of this chapter between critical and metacritical arguments, as the staging of Gosson's plays, certain passages of Lodge's pamphlet, and much of the noise in the street responded not to Gosson's critical argument per se but to the hypocrisy implicit in his newly assumed role. Sidney would take on both arguments in the *Defence*, responding not just to the critical claims of the pamphlet that Gosson had dedicated to him

but also to the idea of the critic presented there with an alternative idea that has tended to eclipse Gosson ever since.

CHAPTER TWO: SIDNEY'S UNCOMMON IDEAS

I. Responses and Replies

The conjecture that Sidney was at some level responding to Stephen Gosson in the *Defence of Poesy* has been widely entertained. In a 1579 letter to Gabriel Harvey, Edmund Spenser suggested that Gosson had been “scorned” (Smith 1.89) for his presumption in dedicating *The Schoole of Abuse* to Sidney without permission. This anecdote, in addition to the similarity of Gosson’s claims to those claims against poetry enumerated in the *confutatio* of the *Defence* (e.g., that poetry is the “nurse of abuse”), has helped to establish a connection between these two critical texts.¹ Arthur Kinney has perhaps made the most of it, arguing that the *Defence* constitutes a carefully crafted parody of *The Schoole of Abuse* in which Sidney offers a send-up of Gosson’s euphuism in lieu of a direct response to his critical claims, with which, Kinney suggests, Sidney may not have entirely disagreed.² Kinney’s argument, and ultimately the question itself, forces us to distinguish between direct and indirect critical responses – or, put differently, between responses and replies. Regardless of whether Sidney resisted directly replying to Gosson on account of critical sympathy or for some other reason, the fact that he does not directly reply makes it irresponsible for us to read the *Defence* as if he had. Katherine Duncan-Jones follows the path of greatest plausibility by arguing that although the *Defence* “is not a reply to *The Schoole of Abuse* ... shared phrases and

¹ The now common practice of dividing the *Defence* into the seven parts of a classical judicial oration (exordium, narratio, propositio, divisio, confirmatio, confutatio, and peroratio) with an added digressio, per Cicero (*De Oratore* 2.19), begins with Myrick, pp. 46-83, esp. 53-4.

² See Kinney, “Parody.”

quotations suggest that [Sidney] had read Gosson's piece attentively" (233). Lodge replies; Sidney responds.

If we cannot responsibly read the *Defence* as a reply to Gosson, we can fruitfully read it as a response. Kinney has done so stylistically; I intend to do so metacritically. In the previous chapter, I attempted to buck the trend of reducing Stephen Gosson to a foil for Sidney by presenting the idea of the critic evoked by *The Schoole of Abuse* as a coherent, viable, and enduring alternative to the idea evoked by Sidney's *Defence*. For all that they may have shared critically, including their mutual disdain for the abuses of popular English drama, metacritically these critics are opposed, which is to say that the abuses they both recognize matter to their criticism in different ways and to different extents. The fact that Sidney relegates the "abuse" of Gosson's title to the *digressio* of the *Defence* speaks to these differences – differences that reflect and are reflected by the more apparent distinctions we might draw between the two texts (that is, Sidney's private manuscript and Gosson's public pamphlet) and their authors (that is, Sidney, nephew and heir presumptive to Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Gosson, son of a Canterbury joiner). Whereas Gosson disposes with poetic ideals and makes common experience the object and measure of his criticism, Sidney aligns the critical and metacritical arguments of the *Defence* by making the object of his criticism "nothing of what is" but rather "what may be and should be" (81).³

Understanding this idea of the critic and the thinking behind it demands that we make recourse to the *Arcadia*. The indirect critical debate between Gosson and Sidney curiously found both of its participants currently engaged in the writing of romances. In both cases, we find the arguments and assumptions of the criticism registered in and illumined by the various features of the romances. Both critics took occasion to engage

³ All citations of the *Defence* refer to Sidney, *Misc. Prose*.

more completely with their own ideas by examining them from two perspectives in two very different forms. Backtracking on the well-trod path of reading the *Arcadia* through the poetics of the *Defence*, in the following section I will read the *Defence* through the ontology of the *Arcadia* in pursuit of the particular response to experience that determines Sidney's idealism in both.

II. The Arcadian Experience

The potential critical sympathies noted by Kinney and Duncan-Jones invite us to examine similarities as well as differences between Gosson and Sidney, and several readily present themselves. Born less than a year apart, both men attended Oxford University, and neither matriculated. Both were devout Protestants. Sidney gave his life to the Dutch cause at Zutphen in 1586, and Gosson gave his, albeit in a different sense, to the English church. Both claim in their critical works to have been forced into the role of critic and express a degree of anxiety over critical authority. Both invoke prosopopoeia in their critical performances, mediating the novel role of the modern English critic through the more familiar roles of schoolmaster and lawyer. And it is a point of great literary-historical interest that both of these seminal English critics first undertook the role of critic while writing romances.⁴ In both cases, we find a discursive relationship between the romances and the

⁴ In dating the old *Arcadia*, I follow Robertson, who argues that the "bulk of the story" was written during Sidney's stays at Wilton and Iychurch between March and August of 1580 (Sidney, *Old Arcadia*, xvi; see also Worden, p. 4) and that the first draft of the old *Arcadia* was "more or less completed by the spring of 1581" (xvii). This dating places the publication of the *Schoole of Abuse* (summer of 1579), the composition of the old *Arcadia*, and the composition of the *Defence*, according to the informed conjectures of certain scholars, all within a year or so of each other. While the window of possibility for the composition of the *Defence* remains 1579-85, Alexander considers 1580-81 the most likely window within that window (316). Van Dorsten suggests that it was written as Sidney was completing the old *Arcadia* (Sidney, *Miscellaneous*, 63); Kinney similarly places the composition in "late fall or early winter 1579/1580" ("Parody" 19); and Worden, following van Dorsten, tactfully claims that "though it cannot be dated with confidence, [the *Defence*] seems likeliest to have been written at the time he was composing the *Old Arcadia*" (10) and makes much of the coincidence. In response to Van Dorsten, Duncan-Jones suggests that "it may equally well belong to the interval between the two *Arcadias*, overlapping, perhaps, with [*Astrophil and Stella*], as hinted by

criticism, a relationship as yet only narrowly investigated by critics in terms of the extent to which the *Arcadia* fulfills or fails to fulfill the doctrine of the *Defence*. Here, however, with *Phialo* and the *Arcadia*, the similarities would appear to come to an end. Even the most superficial comparison of these two works suggest that Gosson and Sidney had vastly different aims (and capabilities) as writers and vastly different conceptions of romance. Although the *Arcadia* evokes an epistemology that can usefully inform a metacritical reading of the *Defence*, and thus stands with its critical counterpart in an analogous relationship to *Phialo* and *The Schoole of Abuse*, that epistemology ultimately sets it at odds with Gosson and his works – *ultimately*, that is, but not immediately; for similarities exist even here.

In the ninety-first sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, circumstances force at least a temporary resolution of the tense stichomythic contest between beauty and virtue, passion and reason, experience and ideal that structures the sequence. Denied the sunlight of Stella, Astrophil must settle for the candle light of other women's beauty:

They please, I do confess, they please mine eyes.
But why? Because of you they models be...

(ll. 9-10)⁵

verbal and metaphoric links and a possible allusion in [*Astrophil and Stella*] 18.10" (Sidney, *Major Works*, 371). Clearly, the precise date of composition remains a question. Yet any or all of these theories ably support the possibility of cross-pollination between Sidney's works, as indeed does his relatively compressed career as a writer. S. K. Heninger observes, "What is notable about the corpus of Sidney's poetry is its inchoate state and the rapidity with which he produced it. The entire canon falls between 1577 and 1585, with a heavy concentration in the years 1579-82. It is therefore appropriate to think of Sidney's writings as a body of closely interrelated work rather than a sequence of discrete items composed seriatim" (Sidney 397). My intention here is to undertake the kind of reading that Heninger proposes and not to pursue a debate over dates of composition. In the pages that follow, I draw upon both *Arcadias* in an attempt to derive from them a more complete picture of the idealism that shapes the metacritical argument of the *Defence*. I maintain a distinction between the two versions of the work (see n. 6 below) if not merely for the sake of precision then to suggest that the ontological dilemma faced by the characters of the old *Arcadia*, a dilemma which, as I argue, creates a need for stable and stabilizing Ideas, becomes more acute in the new *Arcadia*, manifesting Sidney's enduring idealism.

⁵ All citations of *Astrophil and Stella* refer to Sidney, *Major Works*.

It is as if Astrophil's Stella and the reader's Stella have merged. Abstracted from the world of experience presented in the narrative of the sequence, Stella becomes an ideal that Astrophil can admire only as his readers do, that is, in glimpses caught through imperfect and fragmented models of the ideal. Yet it is crucial that the reader must wait until the ninety-first sonnet for this metaphysical shift; that we are made to *arrive* at it, so to speak; that it comes at a specific point in a historically determined narrative arc; and that it is presented to us decked in the trappings of lived experience: "while now ... / ... I am from you ... // ... I live in sorrow's night" (ll. 1-4). Experience – which means living for Astrophil and reading for us (we pity the tale of him) – leads to and produces this shift. The Platonism that underpins *Astrophil and Stella* is presented here not as a set of a priori ontological conditions (as opposed to Gosson's a priori epistemological endorsement of the senses) but rather as a resolution to which Astrophil has been drawn by the particular circumstances of his experience.

Sidney does not dismiss experience with quite the same philosophical resolve that Gosson exhibits in his dismissal of poetic ideals. For it is experience that leads him – or, more precisely, the *dramatis personae* of his fictional works – to posit a need for ideals in the first place and inspires his confidence in the capacity of those ideals to exert a beneficent influence upon the world of experience. Sidney structurally endorses this process in the new *Arcadia* by opting to present not isolated positive or negative models of love or government but rather a world of positive and negative moral and political examples as his heroes wend their way through the variety of experience in the episodic fashion of romance. Heroes, villains, and readers inclining in either direction are afforded the opportunity to benefit from a wealth of lived or read experience.

“I find, indeed,” confesses Musidorus, who has himself fallen in love after having chastised Pyrocles on philosophical grounds for the same crime, “that all is but lip-wisdom which wants experience” (*NA* 170).⁶ Yet even before a more experienced Sidney makes his revisions, in the more parochial old *Arcadia*, Musidorus ironically testifies to the incommunicability of the experience of love in a tale meant to reveal his love and identity to Pamela: “Those pains must be felt before they be understood; no outward utterance can command a conceit” (*OA* 105). Experience precedes understanding in the *Arcadia*, and action triumphs over contemplation. When the lovelorn Pyrocles attempts to defend his “solitariness,” Musidorus has the gentleman’s reply at the ready: “contemplation is but a glorious title to idleness ... the gods would not have delivered a soul into the body which hath arms and legs ... but that it were intended the mind should employ them” (*OA* 16). Accordingly, it would appear that Sidney, no loafer he, has no more patience than Gosson for those “lither co[n]templators ... concluding of Sillogismes in a corner” (*Schoole* E2^{v-5}). Experience matters as much to Sidney as it does to Gosson, but it leads him in a different direction.

Whereas Gosson’s engagement with the world of experience is circumscribed by an a priori endorsement of the reliability of knowledge acquired with the help of the senses, what experience consistently reveals to the characters of Sidney’s works is the ineluctability of what I will call an Augustinian ontology. Building upon Plotinus’s distinction between the multifarious sensible world and the unified intelligible world, Augustine divides all of creation into signs, which are both signs and things, both themselves and something else,

⁶ Citations of the new *Arcadia* (*NA*) refer to the Evans edition; citations of the old *Arcadia* (*OA*) refer to the Robertson edition. On the narrative and stylistic differences between the two editions (which were joined in the widely-read composite edition of 1593, on which Evans is based), see the introduction to the Skretkovicz edition of the new *Arcadia*, esp. pp. xiii-xv and xvii-xx. On textual differences, see *ibid.* pp. lxiii-lxxviii and the Robertson edition of the old *Arcadia*, pp. lii-lxvi.

and things, which are one.⁷ Pressed to its theoretical conclusion, the semiotic cosmos postulated by Augustine, the first of its kind, is one in which all things but God are transposed signs of a truth beyond the grasp of human reason – that is, of God.⁸ Similarly, the *Aradia*, for both its readers and its inhabitants, is a world composed of fluid signifiers that invite misinterpretation, a world in which the sorting out and reconciliation of signs and things must wait for the “then” of Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians: “For now we see through a glass, darkly [*enigmate*], but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (KJV 13:12). Augustine, in his own exegesis of this passage in *De trinitate*, associates Paul’s *enigmate* with the rhetorical trope of the *enigma*, a species of allegory that resists interpretation (15.9).⁹ Augustine’s notion that the sensible world resists

⁷ Here, for example, Plotinus distinguishes between the matter of these two realms: “the Matter of the realm of process ceaselessly changes its form: in the eternal, Matter is immutably one and the same, so that the two are diametrically opposites” (*Enneads* 2.4.3). Compare Augustine at *Confessions* 7.10.16, where he narrates a vision granted by God, but occasioned by his reading of Platonic texts, of a intellectual light “utterly different from all our [that is, sensible] kinds of light” and of the sensible world as a “region of dissimilarity”; or at 4.15.24, where he aligns virtue, reason, and truth with unity and vice, irrationality, and evil with division; or at 11.29.39, where he again invokes the Plotinian dialectic of dispersion and unity, and sounds not unlike a lamenting Pyrocles: “The storms of incoherent events tear to pieces my thoughts, the inmost entrails of my soul, until that day when, purified and molten by the fire of your love, I flow together to merge into you.” I opt for “Augustinian” ontology here, rather than “Platonic” or even “Plotinian,” not to brand Sidney as an Augustinian but to avail my argument of its helpful semiotic extension, its simultaneous resistance to Platonic transparency as well as the utter opacity of sensible phenomena in Manicheism, and Augustine’s attribution of the epistemological ramifications of his ontology to the Fall. I hope to make the benefit of each of these features clear below.

⁸ On Augustine’s idea of God as both ineffable and incomprehensible, see Voiku, pp. 65-76, esp. p. 70, where Voiku addresses Augustine’s conclusion in the final chapter of *De trinitate* that the *imago dei* in man ultimately proves inadequate as a sign of God. On God as the ultimate signified of Augustinian semiotics, see Todorov, p. 41. For detailed studies of Augustine’s philosophy of language, see Kirwan and Todorov, pp. 36-59.

⁹ Here Augustine reveals the significance of the association: “Therefore, it seems to me, as he would have us understand an image by the word “mirror,” so a likeness by the word “enigma,” yet a likeness that is obscure and difficult to perceive. Since by the terms image and enigma, therefore, any likenesses whatsoever intended by the Apostle can be understood, which are suited to lead to an understanding of God in the manner that is now possible, yet nothing is better suited than what is not unreasonably spoken of as His image.

interpretation and his perplexing pronouncement that “every sign is also a thing, for that which is not a thing is nothing at all; but not every thing is also a sign” (*On Christian Doctrine* 1.2.2) dovetail with Amphialus’s sense of “how few there be that can discern between truth and truth-likeness, between shows and substance” (*NA* 452).

The chief features of the plot of the old *Arcadia* bear out this ontology and the slippage it creates between essence and appearance. Misreading drives the narrative from the prophecy that leads Basilius into retreat to the misdiagnosis (misinformed by a misidentified potion) that nearly leads to his premature burial, with various misguided affections, misread situations, and a bed trick filling the space in-between. Both Pyrocles and Musidorus disguise themselves to win entry to Basilius’s camp, choosing roles that they hope will figuratively (which is to say “indirectly”) reveal their nobility and virtue without directly revealing their identities – “such forms,” as Pyrocles explains at trial, “as might soonest bring us to the revealing of our affections” (*OA* 392). Like the signs of the fallen world, however, the plan works imperfectly.¹⁰ Philoclea finds herself perplexed by her feelings for the female Cleophila (“It is the impossibility that doth torment me,” she tells herself [*OA* 111]), who has meanwhile inadvertently caught the fancy of both Basilius and Gynecia. The debate

“Let no one wonder, therefore, that we must labor to see anything at all, even in this manner of seeing, which has been granted in this life, namely, through a mirror in an enigma. For the word “enigma” would not be used here if this seeing were something easy. And this is a greater enigma, that we do not see what is impossible for us not to see. For who does not see his own thought? And who does see his own thought, not I say with eyes of flesh, but with the interior gaze itself? Who does not see it, and who does see it? For in thought we look, so to say, into our own mind, whether those things are present which we also see with our bodily eyes or perceive through the senses, or whether they are not present, and their likenesses are seen in thought; or whether it is neither of these, but we think of those things that are neither corporeal nor the likenesses of bodies, such as the virtues and the vices, as, in a word, thought itself is thought; or whether we reflect upon those things which we have learned through the studies of the sciences and the liberal arts; or whether our thoughts are directed to the higher causes or reasons of all those things which exist in an unchangeable nature; or whether we also think of evil, vain, and false things, either with the sense not consenting, or going astray by its consent” (*On the Trinity* 15.9.16).

¹⁰ For a virtuosic portrait of the fallen world of the *Arcadia* in textual mosaic, see Worden, p. 35.

between Pyrocles and Musidorus over the former's plan to "take upon [him] the estate of an Amazon lady" (*OA* 18), one of the best known episodes of the work, emphasizes this imperfection and indicates that in a world of fluid signifiers, even deceit takes on a morally ambivalent status.

Opposed valuations of womankind and incompatible ontological stances (to say nothing of Pyrocles' distracted mind [*OA* 20-1]) inhibit the logic of the cousins' debate. Musidorus decries romantic love and warns Pyrocles that his "effeminate love of a woman" will not only make him "a famous Amazon, but a launder, a distaff-spinner, or whatsoever other vile occupation their idle heads can imagine and their weak hands perform" (*OA* 20). Pyrocles famously responds with a defense of women and an idealist's defense of love: "Those troublesome effects you say it breeds be not the fault of love, but of him that loves, as an unable vessel to bear such a power" (*OA* 22). (Students of the *Defence*, which hinges upon a parallel distinction between poetry and poets, will here begin to see our destination on the horizon.) Yet all Pyrocles can offer in response to Musidorus's threat regarding the effeminizing effect of romantic love is an unsubstantiated, unreasoned rejection of it: "Neither doubt you, because I wear a woman's apparel, I will be the more womanish; since, I assure you, for all my apparel, there is nothing I desire more than fully to prove myself a man in this enterprise" (*OA* 22). Setting aside the virtue of womankind ("Let this suffice: that they are capable of virtue" [*OA* 21]), Pyrocles confidently asserts that his endeavor will leave him not a whit the more womanish. On the contrary, he promises to prove himself a man in women's clothing, offers a vaguely neo-Platonic prognosis – "when I have a while practised in this sort, then you shall see me turn it to greater matters" (*OA* 22) – and lays out a rather short-sighted if admirably optimistic plan for success: "the principal point is to set in

a good way the thing we desire; for then will time itself daily discover new secret helps” (OA 18).

Pyrocles’ optimism stems from his belief that he can alter his outward appearance without altering or affecting in any way his inward essence. The extent to which Pyrocles feels at home (or at least at peace with a kind of transcendental homelessness) in a world in which essence and appearance have been sundered is revealed by the fact that he provides no rationale for this belief – not even in the face of Musidorus’s direct challenge to it. For Pyrocles, this ontology goes without saying. Musidorus, who, to be fair, later demonstrates the all-too-human ability to change his mind, here in the early pages of the old *Arcadia* argues for a stable correspondence between essence and appearance, inward mind and outward behavior: “your behaviour can never come kindly from you,” he explains, “but as the mind is proportioned unto it” (OA 19). To outwardly seem like a woman, he claims, Pyrocles will have to inwardly become one in mind, which would amount to “the very first down step to all wickedness” (OA 19). Of course, both theories prove correct (and incorrect). Pyrocles’ plan succeeds and fails, helps and harms, just like the cryptic prophecy at the center of the *Arcadia*, which is both right and wrong. Like masks, surfaces in the *Arcadia* conceal and reveal, now with Platonic transparency (Philoclea’s beauty) and now with Manichean opacity (Basilius’s death). What Pyrocles’ defense of his plan suggests, however, is that if the dissociation of essence and appearance allows for the practice of deceit – that is, makes possible the deliberate exploitation of that dissociation for personal gain – it also prohibits the assignment of a stable moral value or essence to deceit. Deceit, it seems, is not always as bad as it seems. Whatever success Pyrocles enjoys as Cleophila testifies to the capacity of deceit to go well and do good in the *Arcadia*. Yet that good is always counterpoised and often obscured by instances of harm brought about by deceit.

Examples of malicious deceit abound in the new *Arcadia*, where we are perhaps invited to compare the well-meaning schemes of the story's central heroes with those of its newly centralized villain, Cecropia. Cecropia presents a proto-Marlovian litany of these to Amphialus in book three:

Wild beasts I kept in a cave hard by the lodges, which I caused by night to be fed in the place of their pastorals ... and against the hour they were to meet ... then let them loose, knowing that they would seek their food there and devour what they found I used my servant Clinias ["crafty fellow" and former actor (*NA* 387)] to stir a notable tumult of country people Now lastly ... with a slight I used of my fine-witted wench Artesia, with other maids of mine, would have sent those goodly inheritrixes of Arcadia to have pleaded their case before Pluto, but that over-fortunately for them, you made me know the last day how vehemently this childish passion of love doth torment you. Therefore I have brought them unto you It is true that I would also by the same practice have entrapped the parents, but my maids failed of it....

(*NA* 446-7)

While Pyrocles and Musidorus concoct sleights to invade the royal camp from one side, Cecropia invades from the other with sleights of her own, now staging an attack with wild beasts, now a revolt, and finally an insidious picnic. All of this keeps the scales of deceit more or less balanced in the *Arcadia*. Yet Cecropia's most dreadful sleights are yet to come in the mock executions of Philoclea and Pamela, and it is in the wake of these episodes that the epistemological implications of Arcadian experience become clear.

While a prisoner in the castle of Cecropia, Pyrocles/Zelma is awakened by a noise and peers down the hall to see a group of people standing around Philoclea's severed head in a basin of gold. It is a scene of blinding horror: "The horribleness of the mischief was such as Pyrocles could not at first believe his own senses, but bent his woeful eyes to discern it better" (*NA* 563). Moments later, reviving from a swoon, Pyrocles hears a voice cry "Revenge, Revenge" but cannot determine "whether indeed it were his good angel ... or that his wandering spirits lighted upon that conceit, and by their weakness, subject to

apprehensions, supposed they heard it” (NA 564). When, a few pages later, Philoclea herself enters his chamber and, after initially (mis)identifying herself as “a poor gentlewoman” (NA 566), properly reveals herself, Pyrocles again mistrusts his senses: “he saw, or thought he saw, indeed, the very face of Philoclea” (NA 567). He can only assume that the figure before him is an angel who has taken the shape of Philoclea to “submit [herself? himself?] to mortal sense” (NA 567). Yet Philoclea corrects his misapprehension: “Do not deceive thyself ... I am no angel” (NA 567). He concludes that she is an apparition – a ghost; she assures him that she is alive. He protests, and she finally disabuses him of Cecropia’s deceptions. Resolved in her identity if in nothing else, Pyrocles submits to a new epistemology: “Alas ... how shall I believe mine eyes any more? ... how can I believe mine own senses? And if I cannot believe them, why should I now believe these blessed tidings they bring me?” (NA 568).¹¹ The *Arcadia* contains no good answer to the first two questions. Sidney finds an answer to the third, however, in idealism.

Experience in the *Arcadia* reveals what I have elected to call an Augustinian ontology that in turn inspires a skeptical epistemology – or, in less angular terms, a salutary distrust of the senses, which, if it falls short of Phialo’s caricature of those Academics who “[doubt] continually whether Snowe were white, or the Crowe black” [B2^r]) nevertheless moves several steps away from Gosson in that direction. Rather than surrender to intellectual chaos, however, where, as in the peasants’ revolt, everyone commands and none obeys (NA 379), Sidney resists dead-end skepticism with idealism.¹² Idealism, that metaphysical anchor

¹¹ David Norbrook has commented on the reflection in the captivity scenes of the *Arcadia* of Sidney’s growing interest in “inner spiritual qualities which make external pomp and ceremony seem empty theatrical” (94).

¹² It is worth noting the sustained affinity between Sidney and Augustine here. On Augustine’s opposition to Academic skepticism, see Matthews, pp. 15-22; Nash, pp. 12-23 (esp. pp. 16-18 on Augustine’s measured trust in the senses); and O’Daly. Voiku offers a useful summary: “We may

necessitated by life in a sea of fluid signifiers, allows Sidney, his characters, and his readers to look past change to constancy, to look past (if not always through) the multifarious sensible world to the intelligible world beyond. Seen through the lens of idealism, beauty strikes Pamela as nothing more than “a pleasant mixture of natural colors, delightful to the eye as music is to the ear, without any further consequence” (*NA* 485). It convinces Basilius, on his better days, that “nothing wins the heaven, but what doth earth forsake” (*NA* 397). And it gives Pyrocles hope that in the life to come “we shall not see the colours but lives of all things that have been or can be” (*NA* 804). It is a consummation devoutly to be wished, no doubt; but meanwhile, in the life in progress, rather than discount colors entirely, Sidnean idealism leaves room for the pleasures of sensory experience and for the possibility of Platonic transparency.

Pyrocles, in the middle of his quasi-philosophical defense of romantic love, makes a striking concession: “But this I willingly confess, that it likes me much better when I find virtue in a fair lodging than when I am bound to seek it in an ill-favoured creature, like a pearl in a dung-hill” (*NA* 135). In setting his sights on those exceptional instances in which beauty and virtue, appearance and essence, coalesce in direct correspondence, Pyrocles is not thinking outside the realm of Arcadian possibility. And while he may well deserve Musidorus’s gibes at his pursuit of a “red and white virtue” (*NA* 137), the case he makes for the necessity of an objective correlative is compelling despite its speciousness: “for, if we love virtue, in whom shall we love it but in a virtuous creature – without your meaning be, I should love this word “Virtue” where I see it written in a book!” (*NA* 136). Even the

suspect the content, or veracity, of a perception, but we cannot doubt that we have the perception itself. Together with the fact that we perceive something, whether real or unreal, is the certainty that we perceive, so that ultimately our very self-consciousness is our surest truth” (73).

narrator of the new *Arcadia* balances a predilection for involved descriptions of abstract emotional and intellectual processes –

That sight increased their compassion, and their compassion called up their care (NA 64) the simplicity bred such amazement and their amazement such a superstition (NA 66) the smart bred rage and the rage bred smart again (NA 98) For whether it were that her wit in continuance did find that Zelmane's friendship was full of impatient desire having more than ordinary limits, and therefore she was content to second Zelmane though herself knew not the limits, or that in truth true love, well considered, have an infective power, at last she fell in acquaintance with love's harbinger, wishing (NA 239) But Amphialus not only conjured by that which held the monarchy of his mind, but even in his noble heart melting with compassion at so passionate a sight, desired him to withhold his hands.... (NA 507)

– with the occasional indulgence in surfaces:

Well might he perceive the hanging of her hair in fairest quantity in locks, some curled and some as it were forgotten, with such a careless care and an art so hiding art that she seemed she would lay them for a pattern, whether nature simply or nature helped by cunning be the more excellent: the rest whereof was drawn into a coronet of gold richly set with pearl, and so joined all over with gold wires and covered with feathers of divers colors that it was not unlike to an helmet, such a glittering show it bare, and so bravely it was held up from the head. Upon her body she ware a doublet of sky-colour satin, covered with plates of gold and as it were nailed with precious stones that in it she might seem. armed. The nether part of her garment was so full of stuff and cut after such a fashion, that though the length of it reached to the ankles, yet in her going one might sometimes discern the small of her leg, which with the foot was dressed in a short pair of crimson velvet buskins, in some places open, as the ancient manner was, to show the fairness of the skin.

(NA 130-1)

It would seem to be the case that such indulgence is permitted rather than prohibited by Sidnean idealism. For insofar as the acknowledgment of the capacity of surfaces to deceive disarms the moral threat they pose, it leaves the spectator (whether narrator or reader) free to enjoy the sensory delights of hero, heroine, or *locus amoenus* without affirming or denying their truth value. Augustine suggests that we may avoid deceiving others by limiting the reality claim of our perception to ourselves: “Don’t assent to more than that you’re

convinced it appears so to you, and then there isn't any deception" (*Against the Academicians* 3.11.26, qtd. in Matthews 20). Error for Augustine, as Ronald Nash observes, lies either in never trusting the senses or in trusting them too far (16-18). Similarly, proper Sidnean idealism would appear to lie not in either of these extremes but in knowing what Astrophil tries so desperately to convince himself, that "beauty but beauty is" (47.9).

"It is significant," writes C. S. Lewis of the old *Arcadia*, "that the whole story moves neither to a martial nor an amorous, but to a forensic, climax" (335). We needn't move beyond the *Arcadia* to deduce the effects of Sidnean idealism upon matters of taste and judgment, for, after all, the old *Arcadia* culminates in a trial. Yet even in the incomplete new *Arcadia*, which lacks the trial scene that was appended to it in 1593, the vagaries and variety of experience generate confusion over judgment, as, for example, in the revised account of the peasants' revolt. The narrator's description of that confusion begs to be read beyond its immediate context:

But no confusion was greater than of particular men's likings and dislikings: one dispraising such a one whom another praised, and demanding such a one to be punished whom the other would have exalted. No less ado was there about choosing him who should be their spokesman. The finer sort of burgesses, as merchants, prentices and cloth-workers, because of their riches disdaining the baser occupations, and they because of their number as much disdaining them; all they scorning the countrymen's ignorance, and the countrymen suspecting as much their cunning....

(*NA* 383-4)

Business as usual among the rough-hewn *demos* of this fiction, we might be tempted to say. But the narrator of the old *Arcadia* takes occasion near the very conclusion of the work (which provided the conclusion of the 1593 composite version as well) to make critical confusion a condition of mortality and, as such, a product of the Fall. Gynecia's narrow recovery of her own reputation is explained in these terms: "So uncertain are mortal judgements, the same person most infamous and most famous, and neither justly" (*OA* 416).

By identifying a set of circumstances – “sort” or social standing, “riches,” “mortality” – that determine a plurality of seemingly irreconcilable perspectives, these passages present us with familiar Arcadian ideas. We remain in the domain of disjointed meaning and continue to wrangle with the problem of the external world; the frame of reference has simply been narrowed from epistemology to judgment. There as here, Sidney resolves the impasse with idealism. Yet whereas direct experience of the *enigmata* of the sensible world leads Pyrocles and others to look beyond that world to the constancy of Ideas, the uncertainty of mortal judgments leads, in book five of the old *Arcadia*, to the appointment of Euarchus.

In Euarchus, Sidney presents a portrait of the ideal judge whose most praiseworthy features reflect the exacting demands of proper judgment within in the complex world that I have been describing over the past few pages. The sort of wisdom required by the ideal Sidnean judge, for instance, is capable of making a Platonic distinction between reason and opinion¹³ and of seeing beyond the particulars of the sensible world to the Ideas of the intelligible world: “wisdom being an essential and not an opinionate thing, made [Euarchus] rather to bend to what was in itself good than what by evil minds might be judged not good. And therein did see that, though that people [the Arcadians] did not belong unto him, yet doing good (which is enclosed within no terms of people or place) did belong unto him” (*OA* 361-2). The idealism attributed to and embodied by Euarchus in this passage receives its greatest test when, after having pronounced his judgment, Euarchus learns that the

¹³ In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates combats sophistic dependence upon “probability” (“that which the many think” [273b1]) with the idea that those souls who have not “attained to the mysteries of true being” must “feed upon opinion” (248b5). He then lays out a basic formula for the dependence of reason upon Platonic forms: “For a man must have intelligence of universals, and be able to proceed from the many particulars of sense to one conception of reason; this is the recollection of those things which our soul once saw while following God, when regardless of that which we now call being she raised her head up towards the true being” (249b5-c1). Sidney’s distinction between “essential” and “opinionate” things clearly draws upon Plato and implicitly places Euarchus in the position of the Platonic philosopher, who deals in truth, in contrast to the Sophist, who deals in opinion.

recipients of his double death sentence are none other than his own son and nephew. Yet neither the shock of *anagnorisis* nor the strong pull of paternal affection can shake his idealistic resolve:

But, alas, shall justice halt, or shall she wink in one's cause which had lynx's eyes in another's? Or rather, shall all private respects give place to that holy name? Be it so, be it so. Let my grey hairs be laid in the dust with sorrow. Let the small remnant of my life be to me an inward and outward desolation, and to the world a gazing stock of wretched misery. But never, never, let sacred rightfulness fall. It is immortal, and immortally ought to be preserved.

(OA 411)

Lacking the playful relativism of his shape-shifting son when it comes to matters metaphysical, Euarchus presents an idea of the judge as an absolute monarch whose terms are idealistic, immortal, and incontrovertible.

Yet in retrospect we can see the father in the son in Sidney's revision of Cleophila/Zelmane's speech to the rebels in the new *Arcadia*, where she herself expresses a need for a form of authority not subject to external interpretation. She explains to the mob that there can be "no government without a magistrate, and no magistrate without obedience, and no obedience where everyone upon his own private passion may interpret the doings of rulers" (NA 385). Zelmane's sense that interpretation inhibits obedience harmonizes with the terms that Euarchus sets for the Arcadians who have appointed him judge. Beyond reminding them that he is but a human being ("a creature whose reason is often darkened with error" [OA 365]) and instructing them to set aside personal differences, Euarchus bids them "lay [their] hearts void of foretaken opinions" and "not easily judge of [their] judge" (OA 365): "since you will have me to command, think it is your part to obey" (OA 365). Though Philanax attests to Euarchus's experience and wisdom in matters of judgment, it is precisely his lack of involvement or direct experience of the matters at hand that suit him for the role of judge (OA 354). Though he is appointed through the common

consent of the people (*OA* 364-5), he nevertheless invests in “pompous ceremonies,” instructing Philanax to set up Basilius’s “throne of judgment,” to secure their obedient admiration (*OA* 374-5). And here, in his savvy manipulation of surfaces and in his unwillingness, for all of his idealism, not to take advantage of any sign that “might be either an armour or ornament unto him” (*OA* 375), we see the son in the father.

So much of the *Arcadia* is contained in Euarchus. Experience has taught him, as he puts it, that everything seems yellow to a jaundiced eye (*OA* 365), and that consideration has in turn led him to make a clear distinction between opinion and knowledge. Yet despite the stock he takes in the immortality and constancy of Ideas, and the loving tribute he pays them both in speech and act, he never forgets that he lives in the sensible world, where people are generally more taken with “exterior shows” than with “inward consideration” (*OA* 375). Experience matters to Euarchus, as it matters to Sidney, for it leads him to a qualified idealism that enables him to deal reasonably with the often unreasonable circumstances (the outcome of the trial is perhaps the chief example) of the sensible world. And Euarchus matters to criticism because he presents a model of the ideal Sidnean judge, whose capacity to make sense of experience depends upon his being provisionally abstracted from its conditions. Like Euarchus, Sidney, in *The Defence of Poesy*, establishes a critical framework (remember Euarchus’s terms) in which the critic is provisionally abstracted from the circumstances of sensible experience – the playhouses and bookstalls of Gosson’s London.

III. Critical and Metacritical Idealism

Bernard Weinberg divides his formidable summa of cinquecento literary criticism into two parts, one dealing with poetic theory and the other with the great literary quarrels of the Italian Renaissance, which Weinberg collects under the heading “practical criticism.” The heuristic effect of this division, Weinberg explains, is to demonstrate “that the two

bodies of thought were intimately interrelated throughout the century” (*History* 1106). We may be tempted to align Sidney and Gosson and the modes of criticism they represent with Weinberg’s dialectic of theory and practice, but ultimately the frame does not fit the picture. The relatively limited body of early modern English criticism does not permit the segregation of materials into these two categories, as does the vast and varied body of Italian criticism, without either misreading or dismembering them in the process. While the bulk of Sidney’s *Defence* may appear to fall neatly into the theory pile, for instance, the *digressio*, which constitutes neither theory nor an instance of Sidnean poetic theory in practice, would have to be ignored or excised. For the same reason, a reductive Aristotelian-Platonic dichotomy, with Sidney and Gosson cast as the two central figures of Raphael’s *School of Athens*, the one pointing up to a golden world and the other down to London, will not suffice either, though here too Gosson’s invocation of Aristotle and Sidney’s praise of Plato lead us into temptation.

What must be emphasized instead is that for all of their differences as critics, both Gosson and Sidney respond to experience. Both react to the literary milieu of late sixteenth-century England; they simply react in very different ways. If any polarizing model fits this formative metacritical debate, it is the dichotomy that Francis Bacon would invoke twenty years later between deductive and inductive modes of inquiry.¹⁴ Whereas Gosson reacts to common experience by looking even more closely and promoting an inductive conception of poetry as that which we find performed on the stages and available in the bookstalls of London, Sidney turns away from what he sees, emphasizing art over artifice, and practicing, if not pure theory, a form of criticism that takes as its object of study not poetry as it is but poetry as it should be.

¹⁴ On my distinction here and throughout the dissertation between critical and metacritical arguments, see pp. 10-11 of the introduction.

Yet like Astrophil, Pyrocles, Pamela, Euarchus, and so much of the Sidnean cast of characters, the Sidnean critic does not begin with but rather arrives at idealism. He begins with experience – with the experience of being waylaid and awestruck by a busker’s performance of the ballad of Chevy Chase (97), with the experience of hearing ancestral songs of valor performed at a feast in Hungary (97), and with the experience of being persuaded not by the arguments but by the “strong affection” of John Pietro Pugliano (73). He begins with his experience of a state of affairs in England that has led poetry to fall “from almost the highest estimation of learning ... to be the laughing-stock of children” (74). He begins with the experience of being “provoked” to defend his “unelected vocation” (73). Experience thus generates the *Defence* in some sense, and it continues to play a limited role in its critical argument. In his argument from history, for instance, Sidney identifies the roots of his vocation as English poet in Gower and Chaucer, “after whom, encouraged and delighted with their excellent fore-going, others have followed, to beautify our mother tongue, as well in the same kind as in other arts” (74). If Sidney himself did not hear Gower as he heard the blind crowder, he nevertheless remains within the realm of experience in this passage, the realm of poets *in esse* as opposed to the right poet *in posse*. Yet the most important contribution of experience to the critical and metacritical arguments of the *Defence* is made not in these parenthetical instances but in the *digressio*, where the Sidnean critic’s direct experience of contemporary English poetry and drama leads him to look beyond it for his object of study. The most important function of experience in the *Defence* is to lead the Sidnean critic beyond it.

Although Sidney places his *digressio* just before the *peroratio*, logically and historically it precedes the rest of the work in the sense that the experience it relates provided at least part of the impetus for the *Defence* itself. In the same sense, the charges of the poet-haters

enumerated in the *confutatio* precede even the provocation addressed on the very first page of the *Defence* by having provided that provocation. Curious, then, that the impetus for the work as a whole should be granted the status of a digression within it. The explanation for this curiosity is to be found in the philosophical process of experience leading beyond itself, as it does in the *Arcadia*. This apparent demotion in rhetorical rank, and indeed the almost dismissive offhandedness with which the speaker begins the *digressio* (“methinks, before I give my pen a full stop, it shall be but a little more lost time...” [110]), would seem quite clearly to express just how unimportant contemporary English poetry is to this critic’s idea of criticism. Yet it is crucial here to distinguish between informal digression, which might indeed signify matter beside the point, and the formal forensic *digressio*, which has been acknowledged as common practice by rhetoricians since Cicero.¹⁵

Both Cicero and Quintilian regard *digressio* as a useful means of *amplificatio*, by which the argument at hand is buttressed up and strengthened through the addition of background or illustrative material.¹⁶ The achievement of that effect, however, depends upon the strict observance of decorum. Quintilian writes, “I admit however that ... such a practice confers great distinction and adornment on a speech, but only if the digression fits in well with the rest of the speech and follows naturally on what has preceded, not if it is thrust in like a wedge parting what should naturally come together [Ego autem confiteor ... eo [hoc exspatiandi genus] vel maxime inlustrari ornarique orationem [posse], sed si cohaeret et sequitur, non si per vim cuneatur et quae natura iuncta erant distrahit]” (4.3.4). English rhetoricians of the sixteenth century followed classical precedent in paying equal attention to

¹⁵ On informal digression in seventeenth-century literature and after, see Cotterill and Chambers, respectively.

¹⁶ See Canter, p. 351 n. 1; Cicero, *De inv.* 1.97 and *De orat.* 2.19.80; Kennedy, *Art*, pp. 116-7; and Quintilian, 4.3.

benefit and propriety in their treatment of digression. Thomas Wilson notes that when properly handled, *digressio* is not altogether digressive: “We swarve sometimes from the matter, upon juste consideracions, making the same to serve for our purpose, as well as if we had kept the matter still” (92^v). And Puttenham, who with characteristic charm translates *digressio* as “the Straggler,” notes that the speaker is permitted sometimes “to talk far from the principal matter, and as it were to range aside, to the intent by such extraordinary mean to induce or infer other matter as well or better serving the principal purpose” (318) – that is, aside from the principal matter but not altogether so.

Scholars have disagreed over the extent to which Sidney himself observes these guidelines in the *digressio* of the *Defence*. O. B. Hardison, reading the *digressio* as an irreconcilable neoclassical departure from the rest of the *Defence*, has argued that it must have been written at a later date and then spliced into its present location. Martin N. Raitiere disagrees, arguing for the unity of the *Defence* and for the decorum of the *digressio* within the context of an ironic individualizing-generalizing dialectic that governs the work as a whole. Yet we can make space for both unity and disunity within the *Defence* if we regard the *digressio* as the catalyst of a critico-philosophical process that ultimately excludes it. My own sense, guided by metacritical interests, is that the relevance of the *digressio* is anterior to the rest of the *Defence*; that is, that the *digressio* matters as a record of the experience that has generated the grand critical argument that occupies the rest of the *Defence* and the metacritical expression it gives off. Once that argument has been made, however, the relevance of the *digressio* is reduced to that of a very digressive digression, a digression that tests the bounds of rhetorical decorum as defined by Quintilian. Contemporary poetry, if we are to take Sidney at his word, not only doesn’t matter; it doesn’t count, for it isn’t poetry: “let this be a sufficient though short note, that we miss the right use of the material point of poesy” (117).

Sidney sketches the currents of a vicious cycle in the *digressio*. Because poetry has fallen into ill repute in England, only disreputable men write it; because only disreputable men write it, good men are all the more reluctant to associate themselves with it (110-1). Nevertheless, Sidney allows a few exceptions to the general trend. He praises Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* despite its "great wants" (112). He acknowledges the *Mirror for Magistrates* as "meetly furnished of beautiful parts" and the nobility of Surrey's verse (112). *The Shepheardes Calender* contains "much poetry," but Sidney, like Jonson after him, can't abide its deliberately archaic language (112). Sidney's friend Buchanan is praised for his neo-Latin tragedies (116), and were it not for its failure to uphold the unities of time and place, *Gorboduc* might stand as a model English tragedy (113). "Besides these," Sidney confesses, "I do not remember to have seen but few (to speak boldly) printed that have poetical sinews in them" (112). It is a short list marked by tepidity and riddled with qualifications, and it is all we get of contemporary English literature in Sidney's *Defence*. From these specifics, Sidney briefly moves on to more general abuses. English plays are indecorous (114-5) and fail both to observe the unities derived from Aristotle by Castelvetro (113) and to distinguish between delight and laughter (115). English lyric poetry lacks *energeia* and neglects the love of God for lower forms of love (116-7).¹⁷ The upshot is disappointment, and that disappointment leads the Sidnean critic (retroactively, in terms of the text) to look for poetry elsewhere.

¹⁷ *Energeia* (ἐνέργεια), which Sidney translates as "forcibleness" (117), is described by Aristotle as that rhetorical effect which "indicate[s] actuality" (*De Anima* 3.11). Quintilian notes that the term is derived from the Greek word for "act" (*ergon* or ἐργον) and identifies its function as ensuring that "nothing we say is tame [otiosa]" ("cuius propria sit virtus non esse quae dicuntur otiosa") (8.3.89). Not to be confused with the more specifically visual vividness of *enargeia*, which, as Jean H. Hagstrum has it, "implies the achievement in verbal discourse of a natural quality or of a pictorial quality that is highly natural," *energeia* "refers to the actualisation of potency, the realisation of capacity or capability, the achievement in art or rhetoric of the dynamic and purposive life of nature" (qtd. in Kennedy, "Preface," xiii). By leveling this particular criticism at the English lyric, Sidney shows us once again the connection between the practical criticism of the *digressio* and the larger theoretical claims it retroactively inspires. The English lyric in *esse* falls short of the capacity Sidney

Experience thus leads Sidney out of the theater, as it did Gosson, but in a different sense of the preposition. Like Pyrocles, he is driven by the experience of a misleading (not poets) and disappointing (...but poet-apes) set of circumstances in the sensible world to distinguish appearance from essence and mere surface from true substance. This distinction in turn informs his critical conclusions. Verse becomes the apparel of poetry and is therefore heir to all the sins of surfaces, including their tendency to deceive:

verse being but an ornament and no cause to poetry, since there have been many most excellent poets that never versified, and now swarm many versifiers that need never answer to the name of poets ... it is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet – no more than a long gown maketh an advocate, who though he pleaded in armour should be an advocate and no soldier.

(81)

Rhyming and versing will no more affect one's true status as a poet than the swarming versifiers of contemporary England will affect the true substance and timeless criteria of poetry. Surface and substance remain distinct. Words likewise become the "outside" of poetry (117); and names, merely provisional (103). Like Pugliano, the Sidnean critic prizes contemplation over displays of practice (73). Retreating from the disappointing literary circumstances of late sixteenth-century England, which he will survey in his *digressio* to underscore the necessity of the maneuver, the Sidnean critic shifts his emphasis from artificer to art (89), claiming that it is not poetry that abuses man's wit but man's wit that abuses poetry and refusing that the abuse of a thing (*in esse*) should make the right use (*in posse*) odious (104). Abstracted out of their original context and isolated from their intended object (poetry *in esse*), the claims of Gosson and other practical critics cease even to make sense: "what dispraise may set upon it, is either easily overcome, or transformed into just

ascribes to the Lyric *in posse* to force upon its reader a vivid impression of its own self-generated and self-contained reality (in a word, its capacity to make one little stanza an everywhere).

commendation” (109). The great irony of Sidney’s survey of the parts of poetry, which is delivered through the rhetorical ruse of seeking out the source of the poet-haters’ displeasure (“Is it the Lyric that most displeaseth ... ?” [97]), is that he never once mentions contemporary examples of these genres. The domain of critical discourse has been strategically relocated from the brazen world to the golden.

This idea of retreat from the brazen world rather ironically opens up a connection between the metacritical argument of the *Defence* and the circumstances of Sidney’s life at the time of its composition. The Duc d’Alençon, brother to King Henry III of France and courting “frog” to Elizabeth, arrived as suitor to the Queen on the 17th of August, 1579.¹⁸ Shortly thereafter, likely prompted by his uncle Leicester and future father-in-law Francis Walsingham – “ordered,” as his self-appointed tutor Hubert Languet described the situation in a letter, “to write as you did by those whom you were bound to obey” (qtd. in Sidney, *Misc. Prose*, 33) – Sidney wrote his letter to the Queen opposing the match. Though there is no evidence to suggest that Sidney was punished or even reprimanded for the letter, the punishment that John Stubbs incurred for his more incendiary *A Gaping Gulfe* (1579) – imprisonment and the loss of his and his publisher’s right hands – suggests that Sidney’s sentiments were likely unappreciated by the Queen (Duncan-Jones 161; Sidney, *Misc. Prose*, 36). Elizabeth I issued a formal Proclamation denouncing any personal attacks against Alençon on the 27th of September (Sidney, *Misc. Prose*, 34).

A reprimand of another sort, however, was on its way. Less than two weeks after Alençon’s arrival, Sidney fell in to a squabble with the Earl of Oxford over the use of a

¹⁸ I follow Duncan-Jones, who follows Greville, in my chronology in this paragraph. See Duncan-Jones, p. 164, for her narration of an August “crowded with incident” as well as a compelling case for Sidney’s swift composition of his letter to the Queen. Van Dorsten, however, suggests a later date for the composition of the letter, judging, based upon an October 1579 letter of Sidney’s to George Buchanan that touches on the topic of the match without mentioning Sidney’s letter, that it was likely written in November or December of 1579 (Sidney, *Misc. Prose*, 34).

tennis court. After Oxford impugned Sidney's character and the standing of his family by calling him a "puppy" (and repeating the accusation upon Sidney's request), the debate became sufficiently heated to earn Sidney a good talking-to from the Queen (Duncan-Jones 164-5; Greville 74-81). She took occasion to educate her young cupbearer on "the difference in degree between Earls, and Gentlemen; the respect inferiors ought to their superiors ... [and] how the Gentlemans neglect of the Nobility taught the Peasant to insult upon both" (Greville 79). The Queen's lecture would have made it perfectly clear to Sidney where she stood and where he stood in relation to her (not to mention Oxford), and the lesson must have come with a sting. In the wake of these events, if not directly as a result of them, Sidney retreated from court. "Though he was not explicitly banished from Court," Katherine Duncan-Jones explains, "he was tied up, if not muzzled, and had for the time being to abandon hopes for advancement in rank or a posting abroad" (167). Duncan-Jones intimates a certain dynamic in Sidney's thinking mirroring that between Elizabeth's court of action and his sister Mary's court of contemplation. For the moment, Sidney preferred the latter.¹⁹

Studies of the political content of Sidney's works such as those of Richard McCoy, David Norbrook, Blair Worden, and Robert Stillman usefully prevent us from reading Sidney's retreat from court in 1579-81 as pure escapism. Like the critical retreat undertaken in the *Defence*, this retreat was brought about by Sidney's experience and bore its impression. A dialectic of private instincts and public action provides the chief creative tension of the *Arcadia* according to Worden (6), who claims that the work, though "in large measure a meditation on politics, is also a substitute for them" (65). Richard McCoy perceives a similar

¹⁹ For instance, Duncan-Jones describes how, in late 1580/81, Sidney "abandoned his sister's court in favour of that of Elizabeth" (193).

balance in the *Arcadia*. In his *Sir Philip Sidney: Rebellion in Arcadia*, we find the old *Arcadia* providing Sidney at once with an opportunity to retreat from the world of direct political engagement as well as a space in which to work out the interests of that world in generalized form: “For Sidney, the work must have been an engaging diversion from the previous year’s battles of faction and policy. Yet his political preoccupations persist in more generalized form, for the duke’s follies and the heroes’ disobedience inevitably have social implications” (38). We can no more attribute political apathy to Sidney than we can a lack of interest in contemporary English poetry. Nevertheless, the comparison helps to fill out our understanding of Sidney’s indulgence of a particular capability and tendency as writer and thinker during his retreat from court: that of redeeming the frustratingly uncooperative elements of the brazen world with the plastic variables of the golden.

The influence of Plato and Platonic texts upon the critical argument of the *Defence* has been well documented, but generally speaking the acknowledgment of its idealism hardly requires a footnote.²⁰ The scope of that idealism is such that the Sidnean critic is unwilling to settle for classical models (those Chirons, Terpandri, and Homers that Gosson can find nowhere in England) in his construction of the poet. For the Sidnean critic, the poet is neither the English poet *in esse* nor Homer, Virgil, Xenophon, or any other single classical paragon, although certainly he inherits more traits from the latter category than the former. It is furthermore safe to say, and the divergence of opinion on the matter goes a long way toward proving the point, that he is not an early modern iteration of any single previous conception of the poet *in posse*, whether that theorized by Aristotle or by Horace, or that

²⁰ On the influence of Plato and the neo-Platonists, see, for instance, Allen; Craig; Dowlin; Hamilton, “Right Poet”; Hamilton, *Structure*, pp. 25-6; Heninger, “Sidney,” esp. pp. 37-42; Krouse; McIntyre; Samuel; and Trimp, “*Apology*.”

banished by Plato.²¹ In constructing his “right poet,” Sidney transcends all extant models, whether actual or ideal, by shaking off the shackles of time, space, and nature. It is a tactic that aims less at critical originality per se than at inviolate purity in seeking out a poet untouched by human hands or thought, which criterion excludes even the most enduring models from the history of poetry (even Homer sleeps) and criticism.

The Sidnean critic thus fulfills the work of the right poet as Sidney himself defines it. Whereas the mimetic poet is likened to a painter capable of reproducing only those faces set before him (80), the right poet, Sidney explains, imitates neither nature itself nor, as Julius Caesar Scaliger (one of the few cited sources in the *Defence*) recommends, nature distilled through Virgil.²² The object of his imitation is rather supplied by the very Ideas that inform nature, permitting him to “borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be; but range, only reined with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be and should be” (81). A right poem is, as S. K. Heninger has it, “*natura naturans*, not *natura naturata*” (*Sidney*

²¹ On Sidney’s deliberate construction of a poet other than the poet denigrated by Plato, see Hamilton, “Right Poet,” and Hamilton, *Structure*, p. 25.

²² See *Poetices* 3.25: “Hactenus rerum ideae quemadmodu[m] ex ipsa natura exciperentur Virgilianis ostendimus exemplis. Ita enim eius poesi evenisse censeo, sicut & picturis. Nam plastae, & ii qui coloribus utuntur, ex ipsis rebus capessunt notiones, quibus lineame[n]ta, lucem, umbram, recessus imite[n]tur. Quod in quibusque praestantissimum inveniunt, e multis in unum opus suum transferunt: ita ut non a natura didicisse, sed cum ea certasse, aut potius illi dare leges potuisse videantur. Quis enim putet ullam unquam talem fuisse foeminae cuiuspiam pulchritudinem, in qua aliquid non desideraretur ab iudice non vulgari? Nam tamesti in ipsis naturae normis atque dimensionibus universa perfectio est: tamen utriusque parentis mistio, tempus, celum, locus multa afferunt impedimenta. Itaque non ex ipsius naturae opere uno potuimus exempla capere, quae ex una Virgiliana idea mutati sumus [Thus far we have presented the ideas of things in examples drawn from Virgil, just as they might be taken from nature itself. Indeed, I think that the workmanship of his poetry finds an analogy in art, for sculptors and painters take from real life those conceptions which they use in imitating lines, light, shade, and background, and they embody in their own productions the peculiar excellencies of many objects, so that they do not seem to have been taught by nature, but to have vied with it, or even better to have given it its laws. Who, in fact, would say that nature ever produced a woman so beautiful that a connoisseur could not find some flaw in her beauty? For though the archetype of nature is altogether perfect in outline and proportions, the actual product suffers many hindrances through circumstances of parentage, climate, time, and place. So we have not been able to get from nature a single pattern such as the ideas of Virgil furnish us]” (113; tr. Padelford, 52).

406).²³ Sidney's disappointment with "second nature" (79) – the sin-tainted sensible world which supplies the "bare was" (89) of the historian and the matter of all lesser arts (78) – comes through in his pessimistic assessment not only of English poets but of human beings more generally, "most of which are childish in the best things, till they be cradled in their graves" and require a sugar coating for their moral lessons (92). His sense that reification degrades Ideas leads him to posit a golden world of wit that qualitatively outdoes nature by maintaining a state of becoming and never coming into being in the sensible world. No lover *in esse* has ever been "so true a lover as Theagenes"; no essential friend, as constant as Pylades; no essential man, "so excellent a man every way as Virgil's Aeneas (79); and no essential poet, as perfect a poet as Sidney's right poet. Given the idealism that informs the right poet's creation of poetry and Sidney's creation of the right poet, it would be unreasonable to expect the Sidnean critic to endorse a method of criticism invested in *opera scriptata* – that is, in written or iterated works. And indeed, Sidney tells us as much. For the Sidnean critic, "works" are incidental to artistic skill: "Neither let this be jestingly conceived, because the works of the one [that is, nature] be essential, the other in imitation or fiction; for any understanding knoweth the skill of each artificer standeth in that idea or fore-conceit of the work, and not in the work itself" (79).

Sidney outlines a poetic process in which the poet stands on one side, his mind filled with an as yet disembodied idea; the reader, on the other, wearing the same disembodied idea in the tablet of his memory (98); and in between them, the merely auxiliary, unfortunately yet unavoidably realized work, the *opus scriptatum*. While other critics, such as

²³ I presume only to borrow Heninger's useful Spinozan distinction, not his argument. For that argument, and an invaluable study of Sidnean poetics, see Heninger, *Sidney*, pp. 223-306. For Heninger's application of the *naturans-naturata* dichotomy to poetics and the poet-reader relationship, see *Sidney*, pp. 48 (where it is generally applied) and 280 (where it is applied to the *Defence*). For the relevance of this model to the epistemology implied by Sidney's theorizing of the "right poet," see *Sidney*, p. 276.

Spenser's E. K., participate in this process by interposing themselves between work and reader, the Sidnean critic hovers above the process, describing it in abstract terms for its own sake. And yet it is here, with his claim that the end of the process is "to teach and delight" (80), with his attention to the moral ends of poetry, and with his insistence that the right poet must move his reader to "practise" (91), that Sidney appears to touch back down upon the earth. Ronald Levao has argued from this basis that Sidney consistently deemphasizes the metaphysical terms of his poetics in favor of its didactic ends: "A poet's effect on the world is as important to him as it is to the world he affects. It is the only way he can grant substance to his creations, the only way he can be sure that his poetry is not a sign of his estrangement" (135). While Levao's reading would have us recognize a critical preference on Sidney's part for "substantiality" as defined in socially-oriented didactic terms – for a Gossonian poetics that attributes to poetry demonstrable and immediate effects within the commonwealth – Sidney's own articulation of the didactic end of his poetics is not so quick to relinquish metaphysics or, it seems to me, to invest the sensible world with substance.

The same preferential distinction between *natura naturans* and *natura naturata* governs the famous passage on Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*. For what distinguishes the poet's Cyrus from nature's is that the former maintains a state of becoming ("a Cyrus ... to make many Cyruses" [79]) while the latter submits to being. Heninger establishes this point in his reading of the *Defence* by incorporating the reader into the process of Sidnean imitation: "The poem produces not a single, one-shot image, such as Nature does when she projects an anterior idea by embodying it in a particular entity, an end-stopped process. Rather, the poet through his imitation produces an image that in turn produces myriad other images, because in our comprehension of Cyrus's significance and in our acting upon that knowledge each of us as a reader continues the imitative process of making" (*Sidney* 279). Heninger is right to

emphasize the resistance of Sidnean poetics to the end-stopped process of what M. J. B. Allen calls, with reference to Plato's *Sophist*, God's icastic art – the Platonic Demiurge's creation of Nature through the imitation of anterior forms (98-9). We must be careful, however, not to let Sidney's attention to moral ends encourage us to end-stop the process of poetic creation ourselves with moral action in the sensible world. Keeping in play the inherent inferiority of the historical Aeneas of Dares Phrygius and Sidney's unequivocal privileging of the fore-conceit over the work usefully prevents us from allowing moral ends to overshadow poetic means. The fact that tragedy fails to produce reform along with tears in the case of Alexander Phraeus does not diminish the value of poetry for the Sidnean critic. Likewise, that the proper end of right poetry is praxis fails to make that end, or the sensible world in which it is carried out, as instrumental or interesting to the Sidnean critic as the right poet and his golden world.

The idealism of the critical argument of the *Defence* pervades the metacritical argument in the implication that the proper object of literary criticism is not poetry as it is but poetry as it should be, not poets *in esse* but the Poet *in posse*. Sidney thus makes a revolutionary case for the unity of poetry and criticism by making the objects of both golden, as it were. Just as the right poet seeks “to bridge the gap between the sinful state and the lost paradise or ‘golden age’ of man” (Sidney, *Misc. Prose*, 190), implementing poetry as a “bridge between two worlds” (McIntyre 358), so too the Sidnean critic seeks to bridge the gap between the disappointing, time-bound poetic realities of late sixteenth-century England and timeless poetic ideals. What needs to be added to these familiar formulations, however, is that after bridging the gap, Sidney burns the bridge, protecting both Poetry and Poet from the nipping impingements of the brazen world.

Poetry and criticism share the same end, the end that Sidney attributes to all learning: “to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence” (82). Like Xenophon, but not exactly like Xenophon, the Sidnean critic bestows a Poet upon the world to make many poets. But the value of criticism consists in the making rather than the having-been-made – in exercising to know rather than exercising as having known (112). Half a century later, readers of Jonson’s *Discoveries* (1640) would learn that, as a critic, Jonson undertook the labor of teaching others in hopes that “they should not be alwayes to be taught” (1755-6).²⁴ Whereas the Jonsonian critic seeks to institute proper poetic practice, the Sidnean critic defends against the possibility that practice should degrade poetic ideals. The *Defence of Poesy* is not so much a bridge meant to accommodate poetry to time as an airtight vessel meant to insulate and protect poetry from time. This end, and Sidney’s marvelous success in achieving it, accounts for its endurance.

IV. The Metacritical Legacy of the Gosson-Sidney Debate

Dispelling what Foucault calls “the chimeras of the origin” (“Nietzsche” 80), we must regard the placement of the Gosson-Sidney debate at the front of the history underway here as provisional if not altogether arbitrary. Nevertheless, these critics earn that position by evoking a set of foundational tensions with which we might map out and navigate the field of early modern English criticism – and perhaps even beyond it. More than anything else, what makes this particular debate such a good place to start is the mutual extremism of its participants. The experience of contemporary English literature flung Gosson far in one direction, off the page and stage and into the streets, and Sidney far in another, off the page and stage and into the intelligible world. The forked path cut by their wide divergence

²⁴ All citations of the *Discoveries* refer to line numbers in the Herford and Simpson edition.

precipitously leads us to other contemporary entries in the rapidly expanding discussion of how to formally respond to English poetry.

Edmund Spenser has already intervened in these chapters a number of times. His 1579 letter to Gabriel Harvey helped to establish a connection between Gosson and Sidney, and E. K. announced his arrival as the “new Poete” (25)²⁵ of the *Shepheardes Calender* toward the end of 1579, the year in which Gosson first published *The Schoole of Abuse* and Sidney wrote his letter to the Queen and quarreled with Oxford. “October” of the *Shepheardes Calender* gives us another reason to turn to Spenser here, for it stages a debate between classical poetic ideals and the harsh realities of the Elizabethan literary milieu that reflects the metacritical tensions at the heart of Gosson-Sidney debate.

In the “argument” that precedes “October,” E. K. characteristically leaves two definitions of poetry unresolved: “so worthy and commendable an art: or rather no art, but a divine gift” (128). Resolving them falls to the two speakers of the eclogue, with the disgruntled Cuddie taking up τέχνη and the starry-eyed Piers, ενθουσιασμός. Cuddie complains that the poet gains nothing for the pleasure he provides (13-18) and scoffs at Piers’ consolation that the true reward of poetry is praise and glory: “prayse is smoke” (35). Trying another tack, Piers advises him to follow the Virgilian *rota* schematized by Donatus, to seek grander themes and thereby, perhaps, to win the patronage of Elisa (37-54). But Cuddie cuts down this hallowed ideal: Maecenas and Augustus are dead, he proclaims, and virtue stoops for age (61-72). Nearing his wits’ end, Piers urges poetry to fly back to heaven (84) – perhaps an injunction to Cuddie to emulate the neo-Platonic *vates*. But Cuddie once again deflates, arguing that poetry is too weak in her current state to fly anywhere and that Colin Cloute, the only poet capable of curing it, is himself lovesick and lost to poetry (85-

²⁵ All citations of *The Shepheardes Calender* refer to Spenser, *Shorter Poems*.

90). Piers makes a final, Ficinian gambit, claiming that love makes poetry stronger and that the reflection of beauty that Colin worships in the unattainable Rosaline will ultimately help his poetry to transcend the limitations of the sensible world (91-6). But Cuddie will have none of it, insisting that the poet, like Quintilian's orator, requires a clear mind (100). Above all, he claims, sardonically employing wine and drunkenness as a metaphor for divine inspiration, what the poet needs is food and drink (103-8).

As Cuddie dismantles the commonplaces of classical criticism, a new critic emerges alongside the "new Poete" of the *Shepheardes Calender*. Cuddie sketches an earthbound poetic economy that requires a patron to feed, clothe, and house the poet; virtuous men and women to supply matter worthy of poetry; and virtuous readers to foment good taste. Within this economy, whether poets write and what they write both depend upon the values and actions of their neighbors. Through Cuddie, Spenser exposes the failure of poetic ideals to obtain in the brazen world and even suggests that the commonplaces under attack have done damage to the state of poetry in England by attributing superhuman abilities to the poet, who in the full light of day needs the same things that every other craftsman needs but isn't getting them. Without decrying the abuses of the stage, Spenser engages in what we might call Gossonian criticism, inductively defining the poet and poetry from the ground up (for Maecenas is dead) and updating the role of the critic by opposing it to that of the neoclassical idealist. If the correspondences are not exact, the comparison is less odious than illuminating.

Such comparisons extend beyond Spenser. Defending his translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* from would-be critics and poet-haters in 1591, John Harington urges his reader to temper neoclassical nitpicking with attention to experience: "But now whereas some will say *Ariosto* wanteth art, reducing all heroicall Poems unto the methode of *Homer*

and certain precepts of *Aristotle*, for Homer I say that that which was commendable in him to write in that age, the times being changed, would be thought otherwise now, as we see both in phrase & in fashions the world growes more curious each day then other” (Smith 2.215). Our common experience of the fluctuations of phrase and fashion should make us think twice before subscribing to putatively timeless critical criteria, and that consideration, Harington suggests, will benefit us in various areas of our lives. We will embarrass ourselves, for instance, if we attempt to “make love” now according to the outdated instructions of Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* (Smith 2.215). By and large, Harington argues, Ariosto follows “Aristotles rules” (Smith 2.216). But if he tends to break off narration abruptly, well, so did Sidney (Smith 2.216-7). If he tends to digress in the first person, which neither Homer nor Virgil did, well, Harington cannily argues, “Me thinks it is a sufficient defence to say, *Ariosto* doth it” (Smith 2.217). Accommodating Ariosto’s poem to an English readership through translation and criticism, Harington defines and fulfills the role of the critic by balancing reverence for ancient poetic precepts with the practical convictions supplied him by common experience.

Framing his project and persona upon “*Erasmus, Rewcline, Sir Thomas More*, and other learned men of that age,” Thomas Campion responds to the experience of contemporary English poetry with an urge to repair it as the humanists of the earlier sixteenth century had repaired learning (Smith 2.329). The means he proposes for doing so is replacing rhyme and English meter with the quantitative verse of the ancients, or “numbers.” By drawing English poetry back toward its ancient origins and the divinity of the Romans and Greeks (Smith 2.332), Campion will elevate its status in England. His suggestion in the introduction to *Observations in the Art of English Poesie* (1602) that “by how much more one man surpasseth an other [in reason and speech], by so much the nearer he aspires to a celestiaall essence” (Smith

2.327) demonstrates his affinity with the Sidnean critic and suggests that for Campion, as for Sidney, to redeem poetry is to bring it closer to God. As a critic, however, Campion proves more willing than Sidney to roll up his sleeves and engage with English poets, if not with English poetry. Much of the *Observations* reads like a detailed manual on English quantitative verse (compare Sidney's one specific piece of advice to the dramatist: employ a *nuntius*). If it failed to discourage him, Campion's experience of English tastes and poetic practice nevertheless convinced him that rhyme had been validated by custom and that he was facing an uphill battle in challenging it (Smith 2.329-30). Accounting for that difficulty, he falls short of Sidnean idealism by grounding his critical program not upon anything quite so abstract and ahistorical as the fore-conceit but rather upon "Old customes," acknowledged as such, in favor of new: "For custome I alleage that ill uses are to be abolisht, and that things naturally imperfect can not be perfected by use" (Smith 2.330). He takes issue with rhyme not because it is unnatural but because it is "lame and unbeseeeming" (Smith 2.330).

Indeed, from a certain perspective, the invention of the critic in England appears as a contest between poetic ideals and a set of early modern circumstances that the classical originators of those ideals could not possibly have anticipated. It is a perspective to which the following chapters will occasionally oblige us to return, as when, for instance, Gabriel Harvey finds himself compelled to demonstrate the practical value of learning, literature, and literary criticism to an increasingly skeptical audience. The greatest liability of the opposed categories that inform the comparisons above, however, is that they threaten to sacrifice specificity for clarity. Distilling the history of the English critic through a foundational tension between common experience and idealism, we run the risk of reducing all critics to one of two types when most, in fact, are both. In Spenser, Harington, and Campion we find the tensions evoked in the Gosson-Sidney debate sustained rather than resolved. These

critics serve to remind us of the equally significant sympathies that exist between Sidney and Gosson. Without forfeiting the heuristic benefits of the tensions evoked by their debate, we might, by way of conclusion, usefully countervail them with a series of hypotheses generated by what Gosson and Sidney hold in common.

Among these is the hypothesis that critical anxiety plays a crucial role in the invention of the critic. Though Gosson, by supplying Sidney with a readymade metacritical other, eases his burden of critical self-fashioning, Sidney nevertheless wrestles with the novelty of his role as modern English critic just as Gosson had. In contextualizing his involvement in matters critical and poetic, Sidney, like Gosson, relies upon passive participles, claiming, for instance, to have been “provoked to say something unto you in the defence of that my unelected vocation” (73). Provocation notwithstanding, at times he appears to reject that vocation along with the critical calling it entails:

Now, wherein we [English poets] want desert were a thankworthy labour to express; but if I knew, I should have mended myself. But I, *as I never desired the title, so have I neglected the means to come by it*. Only, *overmastered* by some thoughts, I yielded an inky tribute unto them. Marry, they that delight in poesy itself should seek to know what they do, and how they do; and especially look themselves in an unflattering glass of reason, if they be inclinable unto it.

(111, my emphases)

This passage comes at the outset of the *digressio*, where Sidney will undertake the very “thankworthy labour” he here appears to shirk. Anxiety over whether he deserves or even desires the title he has spent pages defending and praising to the stars (and beyond) seeps into the secondary critical function of the poet as Sidney disavows critical authority, critical judgment, and even “delight in poesy itself.” He curiously undercuts himself here and elsewhere in the *Defence*, where the enduring claims of this critical monument are reduced to “conjecture” (106) and its ambitious poetics rashly dismissed: “these arguments will be by

few understood, and by fewer granted” (79). *Sprezzatura* alone cannot account for Sidney’s self-deprecation; we must add to it the fact that Sidney, as a modern English critic, is working in a genre whose character, dimensions, and criteria are literally being determined as he writes. It is for this reason that the critical texts, both classical and contemporary, that buttress up so much of the *Defence* fail to convince its author of the worthiness and traditional integrity of his role: “I conjure you all that have had the evil luck to read this ink-wasting toy of mine ... no more to scorn the sacred mysteries of poetry” (120-1).

This shared anxiety leads both Sidney and Gosson to construct their critical identities by culling from second-hand rhetorical materials and making structural comparisons and distinctions within a system of more familiar *personae*. Like Gosson, Sidney mediates the novel role of the critic through more familiar roles, including that of the defense lawyer. As with nearly every other facet of the *Defence*, critics have provided various compelling readings of the persona adopted by the speaker, all of which collectively testify to the dynamic and highly dramatic quality of Sidney’s critical ethos. It seems possible without contradiction to regard the speaker in toto as an academic disputant, a young Socrates, a forensic orator, a feigning poet, a skeptic in the tradition of Cornelius Agrippa, and a neo-Platonist in the tradition of Plotinus.²⁶ He observes the courtly nonchalance of a Pugliano, the model he sets for himself in the *exordium*, in his often playful and ironic tone, particularly in the final sentences of the *peroratio*. His philological methodology, applied to such terms as *vates*, *poet*, *carmina*, and *psalm*, and the precision of his putatively exhaustive taxonomy of the types of poet (divine, mimetic, and right) and the parts of poetry (heroic, lyric, tragic, comic, satiric, iambic, elegiac, pastoral, and certain others) suggest the Aristotelian rigor of a Minturno or a

²⁶ On the speaker as forensic orator, see Myrick; as “eristic adolescent,” or the Socrates of Plato’s *Sophist*, see Allen; as feigning poet, see Levao; as Agrippan skeptic, see Hamilton, “Right Poet”; as neo-Platonist, see McIntyre, S. J., and Craig. On the *Defence*’s reference to “the actual circumstances of an academic debate,” see Sidney, *Misc. Prose*, p. 194 n. 84.21.

Scaliger. He is often monarchic, or Euarchic, in judgment, as when he says of those who mislike Lucan that “the fault is in their judgment quite out of taste, and not in the sweet food of sweetly uttered knowledge” (80). He demonstrates his expertise as a performer in his declamatory embodiment of the historian (“I am *testis temporum, lux veritatis...*” [84]) and reveals his dramatic sensibility in the enargeic and decorous portrait of the philosophers, “rudely clothed for to witness outwardly their contempt of outward things” (83).

From the other direction, Sidney defines his idea of the critic negatively through *apophrasis*, an indispensable resource in the invention of the critic, as the subsequent two chapters will demonstrate at length. Sidney joins a host of other critics, addressed in chapter three, in crucially distinguishing criticism as he understands it from the pedantry of the grammarian (80). In addition, he opposes his idea of the critic to those “poet-whippers” who complain like hypochondriacal women in unspecific (which for Sidney means unphilosophic or untheoretical) terms (98) and to those detractors, the subject of the fourth chapter, “who seek a praise by dispraising others” and inhibit their ability to see worthiness with constant taunting (99-100). The Sidnean critic, cast in relief by these *misomousoi*, establishes and builds upon a sound theoretical basis and attempts to look past the countless opportunities for taunting afforded by the foolish world to the worthiness beyond.

Finally, in both Gosson and Sidney, we find the critic talking about something more than poetry, a tendency each alternatively guards against and indulges. Gosson voices his fear of rhetorically running aground in foreign coasts (*Schoole* A6^{r-v}) and runs aground anyway. Sidney resolves not to enlist the help of Plutarch’s “historiography” immediately after having done so (109) and later playfully chides himself for having “strayed from poetry to oratory” (119). This common slippage indicates the tendency of the relatively inchoate

form of criticism to succumb to the gravitational pull of more established fields of discourse such as history or forensic oratory.

As an indulgence, however, it leads us away from sympathy, indicating, through the specific rhetorical spaces to which these critics range, differences in their understandings of the proper role of the critic and the proper content of criticism. Gosson, as we have seen, exhibits an interest in destinations, dispersion, and outgrowth, both in terms of where poetry and drama wind up after their journey down the ages to early modern London and in terms of where playgoers wind up after an afternoon spent at the theater. Sidney travels in the opposite direction toward origins and the consolidating force of abstractions, a critical trait perhaps best evinced by his attention to etymology (76-7) or his theoretical comparison of the arts in terms of their relationship to nature (78-9). The same impulse that leads Gosson off the page and stage and into the street accounts for the generic imprecision of his criticism, which scrutinizes poetry, drama, bowling, and whoring through the same critical lens. For the Gossonian critic, these cultural acts are of a kind, as they are for the New Historicists of our own critical era, who, from the perspective of cultural anthropology, have leveled once privileged categories such as “poetry” or “literature” within a wider field of social action. Sidney, on the other hand, patrols the disciplinary boundaries between poetry, history, and philosophy and provides a clear-cut taxonomy of the poetic kinds. Whereas Gosson admits the whole of culture to the domain of the critic, Sidney privileges poetry as a unique branch of learning. A third hypothesis follows these observations: the more willing a critic is to take on poetry and poets *in esse* as an object of study, the better suited that critic is to reveal or establish dialectical relationships between poetry, criticism, and other fields of discourse. And a fourth follows upon this: the more integrated poetry and criticism become in a dialectical network of cultural activity, the less exceptional the work of the poet and the

less specialized the work of the critic appear to be. With these ideas, the Gosson-Sidney debate further illuminates the rich and diverse field of early modern criticism. The following chapters will afford many examples of this; for the moment, one will suffice.

Thomas Campion's concessions to experience, custom, and English taste failed to satisfy his self-appointed adversary, Samuel Daniel: "We could well have allowed of his numbers, had not he disgraced our Ryme, which both Custome and Nature doth most powerfully defend: Custome that is before all Law, Nature that is above all Arte" (Smith 2.359). The critical stance that Daniel assumes in defending rhyme from Campion and other would-be neoclassicists leads him, in Gossonian terms, to run aground in foreign coasts. Reinforcing his critical claims with fully articulated theories on the relationship of humanity to nature and the dynamics of cultural development, Daniel provides a metacritical response to Campion that reconfigures the function of criticism and the role of the modern English critic.

Daniel imagines custom interacting with nature much as a weathervane interacts with the wind, the former revealing through its motions the power and inclination of the latter. Rhyme has been customary for so long in England that it has achieved the status of nature. Though, theoretically speaking, rhyme in itself is no more or less natural than Campion's numbers, in practice it is more customary, and for Daniel this makes all the difference: "The universalitie argues the generall power of it: for if the Barbarian use it, then it shewes that it swais th' affection of the Barbarian; if civil nations practise it, it proves that it works upon the harts of civil nations: if all, then that it hath a power in nature on all" (Smith 2.360-1).

Adopting a free-market approach to cultural development, Daniel thus converts a debate over rhyme into a debate over the capacity of culture to regulate itself. This contextual shift carries significant repercussions for the metacritical argument given off by

The Defence of Ryme. To invoke an *Arcadian* analogy, Euarchus is dethroned, and the mob overrules the silver-tongued aristocrat. The will of the many overwhelms the will of the few, and the tastes of the community critically outweigh the tastes of the individual critic, be he never so wise, because the former dictates custom, not the latter. In an unparalleled endorsement of common experience, Daniel urges the idealist critic to “Suffer ... the world to enjoy that which it knowes, and what it likes” (Smith 2.363). This inversion enables Daniel to make a commendation of the barbarian roots of rhyme, a critical commonplace since at least Ascham’s *Schoolemaster* (1570). Moreover, it takes on historiographic bearing as Daniel, pursuing its implications beyond the scope of rhyme or poetry, repudiates Campion’s thumbnail history of what would come to be called the Renaissance, filling in the era of deformed learning which Campion had placed between the fall of Rome and Erasmus with the wisdom of the Goths, the Chinese, and Bede and the medieval English (Smith 2.367-70). The humanists brought no new learning into the world, Daniel boldly claims, just old language (Smith 2.372).

As a critic, Daniel proves willing not merely to take on contemporary English poetry as his object of study but to submit to contemporary English tastes, employing them as his critical standard or measure. This is not to say that he opposes “reformation” (Smith 2.382) but rather that, not unlike Giraldi Cinthio, the cinquecento champion of romance and Italian custom, he recognizes that successful reformation must serve custom rather than oppose it. His engagement of contemporary poetry *in esse* permits him to reveal dialectical connections of the grandest scope and the implications of critical arguments within other fields of discourse, another process which is essential to the invention of the critic and to which we will return in the fifth chapter. Equally interesting, however, is the fact that his integration of poetry into a wider network of cultural activity – his examination of rhyme as one

instance of the process by which nature regulates culture through custom – threatens to deprive poetry of the privileged status it achieves in Sidney and criticism of the specialized status it had inherited from Aristotle.

Like Sidney, but for different reasons, Daniel thoroughly subordinates form to content in his assessment of poetry: “it is matter that satisfies the iudiciall, appeare it in what habite it will” (Smith 2.364). “[L]aboursome curiositie” and “unnecessary intrications” obscure not only poetry in the deliberately difficult syntax of ancient verse and the excessive rhymes of contemporary sonnets, but “[e]uery sceince [and] euery profession” (Smith 2.364-5). In opposing the specialized learning that Campion exhibits in his championing of quantitative verse, Daniel threatens to deny poetry those formal elements that distinguish it from mundane forms of discourse – what Puttenham had called “the ordinary prose, which we use in our daily talk” (98) – and to deny critics the readiest means of distinguishing their practice. The second threat is nowhere more apparent than in his attempt to reason out Campion’s motive in writing the *Observations*:

But now for whom hath our Aduersary taken all this paines? For the Learned, or for the Ignorant, or for himselfe, to shew his owne skill? If for the Learned, it was to no purpose, for everie Grammarian in this land hath learned his *Prosodia*, and alreadie knowes all this Arte of numbers: if for the Ignorant, it was vaine, for if they become Versifiers, wee are like to have leane Numbers instead of fat Ryme Why then it was to shew his owne skill, and what himself had obserued...

(Smith 2.379)

Whereas Campion writes to show his own skill, Daniel writes to defend rhyme and thus to defend custom, England, and nature itself. Where Campion specifies, Daniel ramifies. Yet as he progresses toward what he presents as the inevitable conclusion of this list of rhetorical questions, he risks writing himself out of a job. If the critic has nothing to teach the learned or the ignorant, are all of his gestures necessarily empty and self-serving, as this passage

suggests? If form is the provenance of the grammarian, and ultimately immaterial to poetry itself, then what purpose can the critic serve?

Though Daniel suggests at the very end of the *Defence* that the natural law of change will ultimately make “al that for which we now contend *Nothing*” (Smith 2.384), he nevertheless offers both implicit and explicit answers to these pressing questions. Implicitly, the *Defence* advances the metacritical argument that it is the role of the critic to speak for poetry in a wider dialogue whose conclusions have bearing upon poetry but are not limited to it. Explicitly, Daniel expresses two critical purposes. The first is to encourage the “writer in Ryme” to continue to write, to write better, and thus to redeem English poetry (Smith 2.381). Daniel’s expression of his second purpose presents the critic as culture’s guardian rather than its master:

And therefore heere I stand foorth, onelie to make good the place we have thus taken vp, and to defend the sacred monuments erected therein, which containe the honour of the dead, the fame of the liuing, the glory of peace, and the best power of our speach, and wherein so many honourable spirits haue sacrificed to Memorie their dearest passions, shewing by what diuine influence they haue beene moued, and vnder what starres they liued.

(Smith 2.381)

Few critics have ever made literature or literary criticism sound more special and less specialized. And few early modern English critics better illustrate the benefits and liabilities of attempting to resolve in one direction or another the tensions underlying the Gosson-Sidney debate.

One of the chief convictions underwriting this dissertation is that literature and criticism, considered even in the most general terms as written works and the responses they elicit, are utterly interdependent and mutually determinative. We should not be surprised, I think, to find early modern English writers striving to build up distinctly unique (if also distinctly indebted) traditions of English literature and criticism at the same time. A work

like Francis Meres' *Palladis Tamia* registers the acknowledged interrelation of these processes by pairing the critically established classical canon with contemporary English analogues and by intermingling epigrammatic critical gems from Sidney and Harington among commonplaces from Plutarch and Seneca.

Paradoxically, it follows that one of the chief challenges of writing this dissertation is keeping literature and criticism straight. Sidney's legacy as a poet is one thing, and it cannot be assessed apart from the *Defence*. But the legacy of the Sidnean critic is another, and what becomes of the metacritical argument of the *Defence* in the decades after its composition must be considered apart from Sidney's career and the influence he exerts as a poet. As we have seen, after writing *The Schoole of Abuse*, Gosson went on to write more resolutely antitheatrical criticism. *Playes Confuted* provided Philip Stubbs and William Prynne, Gosson's more fiery and strident antitheatrical successors, with a veritable armory of theological and rhetorical ordnance.²⁷ But if we are to be successful in our search, the legacy of the Gossonian critic must be considered apart from Gosson's career as an opponent of popular drama and his influence upon the "Puritan attack upon the stage." Gosson's change of heart from qualified to unqualified opposition to the stage and his subsequent change of vocation from pamphleteer to preacher did not deny practical criticism or common experience a long and prosperous future in the unfurling history of criticism.

In fact, examining the legacy of these two ideas of the critic allows us more objectively to consider the possibility that while Sidney overshadowed Gosson, the influence of the Gossonian critic may well have been more pervasive and lasting than that of the Sidnean. English critics after Sidney became less, not more, willing to turn away from the world he resists in the *Defence*, addressing it only in digression. Even those critics drawn to

²⁷ See Ringler, *Gosson*, pp. 125-7.

his model, like *Campion*, appear to acknowledge its untenable elements and to modify them accordingly. Poetry's relationship to the tastes, interests, and social practices of contemporary England quickly outweighs its relationship to Ideas in English criticism as the field is prepared to accommodate the kind of judgment enacted in Dryden's pronouncement (as Neander) that he admires Jonson but loves Shakespeare. In examining that field in all its diversity, Gosson and Sidney provide a set of tensions and a pair metacritical coordinates that grant the choices of subsequent critics meaning. Like Wallace Stevens' famous jar, these two critics make the "slovenly wilderness" of early modern English criticism "no longer wild."

PART II: THE MANNER OF CRITICISM

Whatsoever occasion causeth me to be mistaken, as ouer-much addicted to Theory, without respect of action ... I neuer made account of any study, meditation, conference, or Exercise, that importeth not effectual vse, & that aymeth not altogether at action: as the singular marke, whereat euery Arte, & euery vertue is to leuell.

- Gabriel Harvey in *Foure Letters* (1592)¹

[T]here is not one pint of wine more than the iust Bill of costs and charges in setting forth, to be got by anie of these bitter-sauced Inuectiues.

- Thomas Nashe in *Have with you to Saffron-Walden* (1596)²

¹ p. 1.228. All citations of Harvey refer to the Grosart edition.

² p. 3.18. All citations of Nashe refer to the McKerrow edition.

CHAPTER THREE: GABRIEL HARVEY AND THE MERE PEDANT

I. Laughter and Delight

Toward the end of the *Defence of Poesy*, Sidney addresses the difference between laughter and delight, a difference that the comedians of the English stage have overlooked: “[O]ur comedians think there is no delight without laughter; which is very wrong” (115).¹ On the contrary, he explains, laughter and delight are entirely independent types of experience and even “have, as it were, a kind of contrariety: for delight we scarcely do but in things that have a conveniency to ourselves or to the general nature; laughter almost ever cometh of things most disproportioned to ourselves and nature” (115). Despite this contrariety, however, laughter and delight may be joined with benefit, and Sidney undertakes to teach his reader the proper means of doing so. As an example, he offers a picture of Hercules “spinning at Omphale’s commandment” (115), which delights us with its representation of “so strange a power in love” and tickles us with “the scornfulness of the action” (116).

Proper comedy, by Sidney’s recipe, corrects purely scornful laughter with “delightful teaching,” the same stuff we find at the heart of all proper Sidnean poetry. It benefits us in some morally nutritive and lasting fashion – is good, in short, for more than just a laugh. Rather than “gape at a wretched beggar,” Sidney would have us laugh and delight at, among other things, “a self-wise-seeming schoolmaster” (116). Is Sidney jeering here at Gosson, the self-appointed *magister* of the *Schoole of Abuse*? Or is he thinking back on his own comic exploits in *The Lady of May*, which had presented for the delight and amusement of the

¹ All citations of Sidney’s works in this chapter refer to Sidney, *Misc. Prose*.

Queen a self-wise-seeming schoolmaster of Sidney's own design? And by what moral formula, exactly, is laughing at a pedant more "convenient" or beneficial than laughing at a beggar?

The first two chapters of this dissertation presented the Gosson-Sidney debate as an early evocation of a set of formative metacritical tensions sustained in the criticism of Spenser, Harington, Campion, Daniel, and others. Yet Gosson was not Sidney's only constitutive critical other. As we have seen, he also distinguished the role he was at once fashioning and fulfilling in the *Defence* from that of the grammarian, "who speaketh only of the rules of speech" (78) and to whom Sidney relegates the rather pedantic issue of whether philosophical poets "properly be poets or no" (80). Pugliano himself, Sidney's model as apologist, distinguishes his craft of horsemanship from "skill of government" by dismissing the latter as "*pedanteria* in comparison" (73). The horseman's distinction hinges upon the difference between theory and practice and between learning for its own sake and learning directed to a particular, practical end. By setting himself and his idea of the critic over against the grammarian, Sidney follows suit and takes preemptive action against the charge of pedantry, for, as nineteenth-century Italian scholar Arturo Graf has observed in his classic study of this figure, "[t]he pedant is first and foremost a grammarian: an insult to truth, an affront to common sense moves him not; a lapse in the observance of the precepts of Priscian or Donatus sends him into a rage [Il pedante è prima di ogni altra cosa, e sopra ogni altra cosa, un grammatico: uno sfregio alla verità, una offesa al buon senso non lo commuovono; un mancamento ai precetti di Prisciano e di Donato lo fa uscire dei gangheri]" (175). If this metacritical gesture leaves some question as to what the modern English critic is, at least it provides us with a clear idea of what he is not. Proving himself good for more than just a laugh, the pedant, in the criticism of Sidney and his English

contemporaries, joins laughter and delight with benefit, offering himself up as a sacrifice to appease what Gabriel Harvey calls “the world of businesse” so that the modern English critic can be born.

II. “Ho altro da pensare”: The Failure of the Pedant in the Profit-Seeking Age

Strolling Wanstead Garden in the spring of 1578,² Queen Elizabeth I and her train were suddenly approached by a country woman begging audience with the Queen. The woman desperately entreated Elizabeth to settle a dispute between a forester, Therion, and a shepherd, Espilus, over the hand of her daughter in marriage. So began *The Lady of May*, an entertainment written by Philip Sidney for the Queen’s visit to Leicester’s newly acquired Wanstead manor.³ A work overtly concerned with judgment and deliberation, it depicts in its opening scene a tug of war between foresters and shepherds with the Lady of May caught in the middle.

The Lady soon apprises the Queen of the situation in full. She is loved by two men: Therion, a forester, who is lively and brings her (stolen) venison but sometimes beats her, and Espilus, a shepherd, who is rich and writes her poems but is often distant. The question, as she poses it, “is whether the many deserts and many faults of Therion, or the very small deserts and no faults of Espilus be to be preferred” (25). (In critical terms, this debate had long since been settled by Longinus in favor of Therion.) After hearing the cases of both suitors, and overhearing a debate between Dorcas the shepherd and Rixus the forester, “it pleased her Majesty to judge that Espilus did the better deserve [the Lady of May]” (30), and the two camps are reconciled.

² I follow Duncan-Jones in dating the performance. See Duncan-Jones, *Sir Philip Sidney*, p. 148.

³ See Sidney, *Major Works*, p. 334 n. 5.

The judgment at the heart of *The Lady of May* is a critical matter, a matter of discriminating between the virtues of two very different men and judging one superior to the other. Underlying that judgment is the metacritical question of what makes a fit and proper judge. Sidney emphasizes that question, and demonstrates his interest in it, by including in his entertainment not just two rival suitors but two rival judges as well. As the Queen arrives, so does Master Rombus, “a schoolmaster of a village thereby,” who has come “thither with his authority to part the fray” (22). Sidney almost immediately exposes Rombus as a foil to the more capable judgment and puissant authority of the Queen by having him receive for his efforts “many unlearned blows” (22). As the book learning of the pedant yields to the experiential wisdom of the Queen, we are invited to distinguish between these two judges, and their various characteristics, as we have distinguished between Therion and Espilus and thus to redeem scornful laughter with delightful learning. The lesson to be learned from the example of the good judge is not just reinforced but enriched by the negative example of the pedant.

Through Rombus, Sidney presents several paradigmatic traits of the pedant as he understands him. Chief among these is his manner of speaking. From his very first lines of greeting to the Queen, Rombus speaks in language that is preposterously overwrought, verbose, macaronic, and needlessly allusive:

Now the thunderthumping Jove transfund his dotes into your excellent
 formosity, which have with your resplendent beams thus segregated the
 enmity of these rural animals. I am, *Potentissima Domina*, a schoolmaster
 Yet hath not the pulchritude of my virtues protected me from the
 contaminating hands of these plebeians But what said that Trojan Aeneas,
 when he sojourned in the surging sulks of the sandiferous seas: *Haec olim*
memonasse iuvebit [sic].

(23)

Rombus has already failed to part the fray that the Queen has just effortlessly “segregated” with her “resplendent beams.” He fails again in this absurd oration, for halfway through it, the Lady of May interrupts him to brief the Queen more quickly and in far plainer terms. Sidney thus illustrates what we might call the elaborate inutility of the pedant. All of his rhetorical training amounts to a great deal of heat and smoke but no light at all. And his failure to fulfill a practical purpose is just as essential to his character as the language in which that failure speaks.

Rombus takes umbrage at the Lady of May’s interruption, just as he had at the plebeians’ (his term) demonstrated lack of respect for the “pulchritude” of his virtues: “*O Tempori, O Moribus!* In profession a child, in dignity a woman, *in ceteris* a maid, should thus turpify the reputation of my doctrine with the superscription of a fool!” (24). For the pedant, the world is above all an insolent place. He encounters insolence around every corner, and he can no more understand it than he can avoid it. His bewilderment in this regard is primarily a factor of self-ignorance, which Sidney signals with Rombus’s misquotation of Cicero (“*O Tempori, O Moribus!*”) and, earlier, Virgil (“*Haec olim memonasse iuvebit*”). Granted self-knowledge and self-critical capacity, Rombus might recognize these errors and acknowledge those flaws of behavior that provoke the ill will of his neighbors. But he doesn’t. He remains a pedant, and the world remains insolent.

Despite having made a career of alienating himself from the insolent world, the pedant depends upon the world and its insolence for his identity. He is, after all, a teacher, and *pedantry* and *pedantic* are words that assume a relationship and a dialogue, even if it’s a rather one-sided dialogue. This consideration leads us to another paradigmatic trait that Sidney illustrates with Rombus, one which is external to him. It consists in his relation to the Lady of May, a figure who, despite those elements of inferiority which Rombus eagerly

enumerates, proves superior to the pedant in common sense and in agency. For it is she – a child, a woman, a maid – who exposes Rombus for what he is and dismisses him with refreshing directness: “Leave off, good Latin fool” (24). Rombus, like many pedants before and after him, thus finds himself in the company of a younger and wiser satirist.

The unique capacity of the pedant to know at once so much and so little comes through clearly in an anecdote from sixteenth-century Italian critic Anton Francesco Doni’s *Marmi* (1552), in which a pedant, having seen his student spit upon an iron to test its heat, tries the same trick with his lasagna and badly burns his tongue (Graf 174). Rombus owes his place in the metacritical drama of *The Lady of May* above all to this trait – to the pedant’s customary investment in book learning at the expense of common sense. We see it most clearly in his attempt to intercede in the debate between Dorcas and Rixus. Rather than respond to the matter of their debate (whether Therion or Espilus will win the day), he addresses its manner, offering in the process a brief and incomprehensible lesson in logic and rhetoric. When this fails to bring resolution to the matter, it falls once again to the Lady of May to judge the better judge, and she opts for the Queen, “whose sweet spirit hath passed through greater difficulties” (30). Rombus’s learning, which has failed to enable him to finish a sentence, much less to judge a marriage contest, loses out to the wisdom of the Queen, which is a factor of her experience. “Judge you,” Espilus entreats the Queen, “to whom all beauty’s force is lent” (26). And Therion: “Judge you of love, to whom all love is bent” (26).

Time and again, the pedant fails and is dismissed. These failures and dismissals are made all the more metacritically significant in *The Lady of May* by the context of marriage, which stands in metonymy for the world of practical affairs to which the self-wise-seeming

schoolmaster stands opposed.⁴ The business of courtship, family mergers, and procreation finds the pedant not at a loss for words, of course – never at a loss for words – but with nothing real to contribute. Rombus must settle for dramatic, as opposed to practical, utility. Dramatically, he serves as a comic foil to set off the social utility of marriage. At its best, marriage promises the hope of new alliances, new financial security, and new life. Its forward-looking investment in novelty gleams against the obscure, precedent-obsessed mutterings of the pedant.

Before Sidney, Italian comedy had fortuitously discovered that directly or indirectly involving the pedant in the business of love and marriage was a foolproof means of amplifying his elaborate inutility and winning laughs.⁵ Pietro Aretino's comedy *Il Marescalco* (written c. 1526-7 and printed in England by John Wolfe in 1588), which features one of the seminal pedants of Renaissance drama,⁶ represents the crowning achievement of this tradition. It also lays a foundation for those paradigmatic traits that come to define the character from the stock pedant of the *commedia dell'arte* to Shakespeare's Holofernes: an investment in book learning at the expense of common sense, urbanity, experiential knowledge, and social relevance or utility; an overweening and flamboyantly showcased obsession with precedent, which underwrites a conviction that there is nothing new under the sun; an absurdly macaronic tongue; and an unfortunate tendency to place himself in the

⁴ The metonymic expression of action and practical interests through love and marriage might be compared to the encoding of social and political ambition as courtly love in English sonnets from Wyatt onward. See Arthur F. Marotti, "Love Is Not Love": Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *ELH* 49:2 (1982), 396-428.

⁵ Cf. Graf: "non di rado infatti il pedante è innamorato, e s'intende, senza dirlo, che di quanti pedanti son sulla scena, l'innamorato è il più ridicolo" (205). We will find the pedant in love below in *Pedantius*.

⁶ Cf. Graf: "Il *Marescalco* fu stampato la prima volta nel 1533 e da indi in poi le commedie in cui ha parte il pedante si moltiplicano fuor di misura" (200).

company of a younger and socially inferior satirist figure, a tendency he inherits from the *miles gloriosus* going back to Aristophanes.⁷ These qualities come to light in equally paradigmatic ways in *Il Marescalco*, as Aretino exposes his Pedante to raillery he fails to recognize as such and to practical jokes he fails to anticipate. What's more, by embroiling him in a comic plot teleologically oriented toward marriage, Aretino, like Sidney after him, exposes the pedant's self-inflicted alienation from such matters. Marriage, which, as we shall see, Aretino explicitly links to procreation through his pedant, stands in metonymy here as in *The Lady of May* for what Philocosmus calls, in Samuel Daniel's critico-poetic dialogue *Musophilus* (1599), "the wiser profit-seeking age."

Aretino builds his comedy from a simple design. The Duke of Mantua has in his employ one Marescalco, or stable master, who is, as the Istrione of the play explains in his prologue, "as adverse to women as usurers are to spending [ritroso con le donne, come gli usurai con lo spendere]" (33).⁸ For his and our mutual amusement, the Duke decides to play a trick on the Marescalco by arranging his marriage. After five acts of anxious fretting and grouching, however, standing at the altar, the Marescalco takes a closer look at his bride:

MARESCALCO: Oh, Marescalco, you nitwit, you ox, you buffalo, you simpleton -- it's Carlo the page! Ha, ha, ha! [O castrone, o bue, o bufalo, o scempio che sono, egli è Carlo paggio, ah, ah, ah!]

(110)

With this, the punch line of the Duke's joke, the Marescalco rejoices and the comedy reaches an end.

⁷ Daniel C. Boughner identifies Dionysus and his spiteful servant Xanthius, from Aristophanes *The Frogs*, as the paradigmatic pair. See Boughner, pp. 3-4.

⁸ All citations of *Il Marescalco* refer to page numbers in the De Sanctis edition.

The Pedante has been called upon by the Duke – also, we may assume, for the sake of general amusement – to provide the marriage sermon. We encounter him first in 1.9, where he shares this news with the Marescalco in characteristic fashion:

all of this his Excellency has discussed *nobiscum*, and he has commanded that *ego agam oratiunculam*, that is, to put it vulgarly, that I compose the nuptial sermon [il tutto sua Eccellenzia ha conferito nobiscum, et hammi imposto che ego agam oratiunculam, cioè componga il sermone nuziale, parlandoti idiotamente].

(49)

Aretino thus draws the substance of his pedant, as Sidney will, chiefly from the overblown and macaronic quality of his language (in 2.11, the Pedante will boast of his success in writing macaronic verse). Lest we miss the layered irony of his having been commissioned to compose the mock marriage sermon, a task for which he appears ideally (un)suited, we have the Marescalco to guide our response. Upon being greeted in Latin, he urges the Pedante to speak plainly: “Speak in the vernacular; I’ve got too much on my mind to think about your astrology [Parlate per volgare, ché ho altro da pensare che le vostre astrologie]” (48). He thus draws a clear distinction between the impertinent, supermundane concerns of the pedant (“le vostre astrologie”) and his own real-world exigencies (“altro da pensare”). The exchange provides a measure of just how quickly patience for pedantry wears thin in Mantua, especially with a wedding in the works. Just before his sermon in 5.10, which he intends to deliver in Latin according to the precedent set by Cicero, the Pedante is interrupted by the Count, who reiterates the Marescalco’s earlier plea, urging the Pedante to speak as simply as possible (109). His volubility becomes a joke for his audience to riff on in 5.3. The Marescalco punctuates his extended oration in that scene by marking the end of its acts (“Sound the pipes for the second act [Risonate i pivi al secondo]!” [101]) to the great amusement of his courtly companions.

The Pedante's various interlocutors weigh the matter of his language as lightly as they do its manner. If his macaronic affectation and the sheer volume of his words provide sure signs by which to identify him, the hollowness and futility of his efforts at persuasion provide the reason why he must be identified and dismissed. His obsession with precedent, which leads him in 4.5 to footnote a conversation between Giannicco, the Marescalco, and Jacopo with classical precedents for their arguments and observations, leads in 5.3 to his pedantic apotheosis. In a final attempt to persuade the Marescalco to marry, the Pedante issues forth a prodigious litany of classical and contemporary precedents – virtuous Italian men and women to whom the Marescalco's future progeny might aspire, should he consent to the marriage. “You sure know a lot of names [Voi sapete di molti nominativi]” (98), exclaims the Cavaliere mockingly. The Pedante, none the wiser, earnestly responds, “*Ego habeo in cathalogo all of the names virorum et mulierum illustrium*, and I have memorized them [Ego habeo in cathalogo tutti i nomi virorum et mulierum illustrium, et hogli apparati a menti]” (98). Despite his best efforts, the oration fails almost as soon as it starts. Having written it off from the outset as a joke (“Questi sono gli spassi” [98]), the Marescalco and the other courtiers regularly interrupt the Pedante with their own ironic commentary and belly laughs.

The Marescalco counters ideal with real and high with low, opposing the virtuous precedents cited by the Pedante with readier examples drawn from the shadier streets of Mantua. His male heirs, he wagers, might just as likely become pimps or thieves as the next Bembo or Michelangelo, and his female heirs might just as likely become whores as the next Marchessa di Pescara (101). The fatal blow comes toward the end of the scene, when the Marescalco commandeers the language of the Pedante to illustrate a crucial difference between them: “You'll soon see *cuius figurae* [through specific examples, i.e., in practice, a

rhtheoretical joke] that your chatter amounts to nothing [Or vedete cuius figurae, che le vostre chiacchiere non danno in nulla]” (100). Whether by avoiding the marriage altogether or, as it happens, by wedding a wife who can’t possibly conceive, the Marescalco will prove the commonplace-book piffle of the Pedante worthless in action by opposing theory with practice and precedent with novelty. Together, the world of heroes and angels the Pedante projects in his *nominativi*-loaded oration and the alienated stance he assumes as pedant serve as a contrastive backdrop against which the world and actions of the Marescalco assume meaning. Just as the pedant defines himself in opposition to the insolence of the satirist, so the satirist defines himself in opposition to the irrelevance of the pedant.

Giannicco, the Marescalco’s stable boy (and possibly his lover), takes aim at the Pedante in 1.11 and, even more capably than the Marescalco, fills the role of attendant satirist. In 2.1, he jocosely calls the Pedante “il Pedante da i *cuius*” and “quello, che insegna il *pater* a i puttini” (52, my italics) – in essence, the declension guy (52 n. 1). The role strikes Giannicco as an inherently ridiculous one, and he recommends the Pedante to the young page of the Cavaliere as an ideal target for his newly acquired firecrackers. Nevertheless, Giannicco clearly delights in the company of the Pedante, if only for the occasion it provides for raillery, and the Pedante likewise expresses his affection for the boy, praising his intellectual potential and lamenting his limited education (2.2). Aretino thus provides us with a paradigmatic instance of pedant and satirist as a set of positive and negative charges diametrically opposed yet irresistibly attracted to each other. As they interact over the course of the play, their roles curiously become increasingly less opposed and less distinct.

One approach Giannicco takes to exposing the limits of the Pedante’s learning is deliberately to misunderstand him. Misunderstandings involving the comically serendipitous misapprehension of a word or phrase were a staple of Renaissance comedy, and Aretino

employs the device elsewhere, even in *Il Marescalco*, without reference to pedantry. Yet in the case of the pedant, that giver of declensions and putative master of words, mistaken words and misunderstanding become particularly resonant. Disastrous misinterpretation is the hallmark of Agrippa's grammarian in *De Vanitate Scientiarum* (1527), which was written within a year of Aretino's play. Giannicco's use of the device continues to draw upon a distinction between supermundane and mundane, ideal and actual, thought and action with which Aretino describes the difference between the Pedante and the other characters of the play.

In their first encounter, Giannicco demands of the Pedante, "What were you speaking to my boss about? Tell me, if you're honest [Di che parlavate voi con il mio padrone? ditemelo, s'egli è onesto]" (50). And here begins the wordplay, clearest in the Italian original:

PEDANTE. De le copule matrimoniali.
 GIANNICCO. Come, domine, de le scrofule?
 PEDANTE. Io dico copule.
 GIANNICCO. Che cosa sono pocule?
 [PED. Of matrimonial copulae.
 GIAN. What's that, sir? Of scrofula?
 PED. Copulae, I say.
 GIAN. What are pocule?]

(50)

In response to the Pedante's expression of the marriage bond, Giannicco presents first a disfiguring disease and second a cup of wine, both of which deflate the bombast of the Pedante's language with latent bawdiness.⁹ In their next scene together (2.2), Giannicco mistakes the Pedante's praise of his nature or "indole" for "dondola" or "weasel," as if confessing to his innocent interlocutor the true nature of that nature he has come to admire.

⁹ Cf. the Sbrocchi and Campbell translation, where it is suggested that "scrofula" also signifies "sow" or "loose woman" and that "pocula" may obliquely indicate the act of sodomy through *po(i)cula* (118 n. 29).

Both of these comic exchanges hinge upon the ability of Giannicco to speak to the audience on one level while the Pedante listens in from another and hears nothing.

These gibes culminate later on in the same scene, when the young page lights the firecrackers he has attached to the robes of the Pedante. In an attempt to calm the rage of the Pedante in the aftermath, Giannicco begins a transition from satirist to tutor, instructing the Pedante in the ways of the world of experience: “Sir, these are just the jokes that people play; they mean nothing [Maestro, le son burle che si usano, e non importano]” (53). Giannicco is to be credited here with a noteworthy insight, for it stands to reason that the Pedante’s umbrage arises both from the impudence of the prankster page and from the inscrutability of the prank, its resistance to the annotative authority with which the Pedante inscribes his own private world. The public world of Mantua, where actions and events can be meaningless and time and space refuse to hold still and be decrypted, leaves the Pedante bewildered. Giannicco graciously attempts to educate him, and the Pedante humbly submits to his lesson.

The Pedante’s education continues in the penultimate scene of the play, where Aretino digs deeper into the symbiotic relationship between pedant and satirist. Now, it is the Pedante who misunderstands when the Conte invites him in to “pettinare” (111). Taking the verb literally as the action of a hairdresser, the Pedante responds, “Neither I nor anyone in my family has ever been a barber, and moreover I am accustomed to be combed rather than to comb [Né io, né niuno mio parente fu mai barbitonsore, e sono uso a essere pettinato e non a pettinare]” (111). This gets a laugh from Giannicco, who explains that among soldiers “pettinare” is slang for freeloading – eating on someone else’s dime. Urging the Pedante in to feast, Giannicco warns him, “Hurry up ... unless you want to eat with gloves [Espeditevi ... se non mangiarete con i guanti]” (111). Once again, the Pedante

misunderstands the phrase, and Giannico responds: “I’ll have to be paid, if you want me to teach you that one [Voglio esser pagato, se volete che io vi insegni quest’altra]” (111). The *magister* has become the student, and the satirist has become the tutor.

Rombus and the Pedante capably stand in this brief introductory survey for a host of stage pedants that gradually familiarized the sixteenth century with the traits outlined above as the pedant became an increasingly coherent and transparent sign for the abuse of learning at the expense of practical utility. Off stage, addressing elocution in the third book of his *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553), Thomas Wilson effectively enlarges the domain of that sign by warning his readers against employing the kind of “inkhorn terms” that mark the speech of Rombus and the Pedante. Wilson labels this kind of speech “affected Rhetorique” (83^v)¹⁰ and indicates in its practitioners a prioritization of manner over matter: “The mysticall wise men, and Poeticall Clerkes, will speake nothing but quaint proverbs, and blinde allegories, deliting moche in their owne darknesse, especiallie when none can tell what thei dooe saie” (83^v). Such clerks, delighted by their own inscrutability, would evidently prefer to be understood to be learned than simply to be understood. Worse yet, Wilson adds, there are auditors ready to take the bait: “I knowe them that thinke Rhetorique, to stande wholie upon darke woordes, and he that can catche an ynke horne terme by the taile, hym thei coumpte to bee a fine Englisheman, and a good Rhetorician” (83^v). Wilson, in what was the most comprehensive manual of rhetoric available in English at the time, takes a stand against this view of rhetoric, and the means he elects for doing so is satire.

Comparing himself to Will Sommer, the famous jester of the Henrician court whom Nashe would later invoke, Wilson follows in the footsteps of Giannicco and the Lady of May and undertakes to expose the folly of the pedant. His satire takes the form of a letter

¹⁰ Citations of Wilson refer to the 1560 edition.

written “by a Lincolneshire man ... to a gentilman that then waited upon the lorde Chauncellour” in request of a paid benefice:

Pondering, expending, and revoluting with my self your ingent affabilitee, and ingenious capacitee, for mundane affaires: I can not but celebrate and extolle your magnificall dexteritee, above all other There is a sacerdotall dignitie in my native countrey, contiguate to me, where I nowe contemplate: which your worshipfull benignitee, could sone impetrate for me, if it would like you to extende your s[ch]edules, and collaute me in them, to the right honourable lorde Chauncellour, or rather Archigrammarian of Englande.

(83^{r-v})

The tone of the letter should be unmistakable to readers of *Il Marescalco*, and Sidney may well have drawn on it in writing the part of Rombus.¹¹ Wilson includes this satirical letter in his rhetoric manual for the same reason that Sidney includes Rombus in *The Lady of May*, namely, for its delightful teaching of the distinction between pedantry and wisdom, affected rhetoric and plain speech, and for its lively demonstration of the elaborate inutility of inhorn terms. For “[w]hat wise man reading this letter, wil not take him for a very Caulfe, that made it in good earnest, and thought by his ynkepot termes, to get a good Parsonage[?]” (83^v). If the measure of speech is understanding (“Dooe we not speake bicause we would have other to understand us ... [?]), and the measure of a suit is its success, then the Lincolneshire man has failed. Like Sidney in the *Defence* inviting his readers to laugh at the pedant and to render unto the grammarian those things which are the grammarian’s, Wilson preemptively defends himself and his craft from the charge of pedantry by emphasizing his pragmatism through the satire of the pedant.

III. The Trial of Learning

What makes the pedant not only a proper but a ripe subject for satire in the second half of the sixteenth century in England is his coupling of laughter with a particularly topical

¹¹ See Sidney, *Misc. Prose*, pp. 15-16. Sidney’s pedant may also owe something to Rabelais’s Janotus. See Prescott, p. 58.

source of delight. While readers and theater audiences laugh – and they did laugh – at his inherently ridiculous language, his ironic lack of common sense, his misadventures in love, his frustrated social ambitions, and his all-too-easy victimization at the hands of the satirist, they meanwhile learn something of “conveniency” to themselves about the place of learning in “the wiser profit-seeking age.” Laughing at the pedant, unlike laughing at the beggar, serves to draw England closer to the destiny it has designed for itself as a key player in international trade and exploration by turning the insulated and backward-looking humanist into a joke¹² and thus prioritizing action over contemplation, practice over theory, and novelty over antiquity. To indulge an even bolder generalization, we might regard the pedant as one wedge with which early modern England established its independence from its medieval past. When the comedy ends, the lead characters, young and beautiful, exit the stage in pairs and head off to stake their claim in the new world, leaving the pedant behind in solitude.¹³

At the same time, however, laughing at the pedant threatens to undermine the foundation of learning and literary art in England. In the final decades of the sixteenth century, as philosophical skepticism and anti-intellectualism trend upward and the pedant gains the status of a type,¹⁴ self-preservation demands that learning assume a new and frankly practical orientation. In short, it falls to learning to distinguish itself from mere pedantry. By the same token, critics wishing to secure a space for literary study in the “wiser profit-

¹² In a wonderfully apt turn of phrase, Graf identifies the pedant as the illegitimate son of humanism: “I pedanti sono figli, non in tutto legittimi, se si vuole, ma pur figli, dell’umanesimo” (190).

¹³ Cf. Graf: “non di rado, rimasto solo sulla scena, da licenza agli spettatori, e con l’ultime sue parole suscita l’ultima risata” (206).

¹⁴ On the rise of skepticism in the later sixteenth century, see Richard Popkin, *The History of Skepticism from Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003) and Richard Tuck, *Philosophy and Government, 1572-1651* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), pp. 31-64. The relation of late sixteenth-century English anti-intellectualism to the idea of the pedant will be addressed at length below.

seeking age” are forced to define themselves in opposition to the pedant and to demonstrate in plain speech the practical benefits of fostering an English tradition of poetry.

George Puttenham, putative author of the *Arte of English Poesy* (1589), offers insight into the troubled relationship between poetry and the world of business, and, as a critic, attempts to mediate between the two. Approaching the matter from the side of poetry, he explains how poetry and poets have become “contemptible” (106) in Elizabethan England with reference to political interests and ambition:

And peradventure in this iron and malicious age of ours, princes are less delighted in [poetry], being over earnestly bent and affected to the affairs of empire and ambition, whereby they are as it were enforced to endeavour themselves to arms and practices of hostility, or to intend to the right policing of their states, and have not one hour to bestow upon any other civil or delectable art of natural or moral doctrine, nor scarce any leisure to think one good thought in perfect and godly contemplation, whereby their troubled minds might be moderated and brought to tranquility.

(111)

When the prince concerns himself “over earnestly” with empire and ambition, sacrificing his fancy to his less perspicuous senses, the arts fall into desuetude, and the whole nation suffers. Would-be poets are forced either to suppress their writings or to publish anonymously, and poetry becomes a thankless undertaking. The ramifications of these unfortunate events, however, extend beyond poetry. For the relationship between politics and poetry outlined here, a relationship that Puttenham emphasizes by calling poetry a “civil ... art,” suggests reciprocity.

At the most basic level, poetry serves as a cultural index of sociopolitical stability or well-being. We can learn something about a nation from the quality its poetry: “In other ages it was not so....” (112). Yet if empire and ambition cost the nation poetry, it stands to reason that the loss of poetry should cost the nation something as well. Puttenham estimates that cost in his well-known excursus on fancy. Contempt for poetry, he explains,

has led poets to be called “fantastical” and “light-headed or fantastical” men to be called poets (109). In effect, poetry, widely considered to be “superfluous” and “vain” (109), has become a sign for impracticality, and “poet” a byword for a certain fey, head-in-the-clouds attitude that stands in the way of ambition and empire. Puttenham attempts to recuperate fancy and to reconcile differences between the *musophili* and the *philocosmi* with a practical appeal to ambition and empire. He concedes that a disordered fancy breeds “chimeras and monsters in man’s imaginations” (110). At the same time, however, a well-ordered fancy represents unto the soul “all manner of beautiful visions” (109). Without it,

there could be no politic captain, nor any witty engineer or cunning artificer, nor yet any law-maker or counsellor of deep discourse ... of this sort of fantasy are all good poets, notable captains strategematic ... all legislators, politicians, and counsellors of estate, in whose exercises the inventive part is most employed and is to the sound and true judgment of man most needful.

(109-10)

In other words, the production of good poetry depends upon the same domestic product that guarantees a nation stable leadership. The waning of fancy heralded by the neglect of poetry in Elizabethan England may therefore be indicative of a deeper and potentially disastrous problem, a problem whose diagnosis depends in this instance upon critical inquiry. The metacritical implication of Puttenham’s argument is that the failure of critics to demonstrate their own practical utility and the practical utility of English poetry threatens to dismantle English literary tradition before it begins. It is a failure which Puttenham hopes to correct.

If the prince neglects the poet, this critic, at least, hardly neglects the prince. Addressing his work to the Queen, a poet herself, and one whose wisdom, lest we forget, won out over the book learning of Rombus at Wanstead, Puttenham gears his criticism toward the practical and tempers discipline with delight: “if I should seem to offer you this

my device for a discipline and not a delight, I might well be reputed of all others the most arrogant and injurious, yourself being already, of any that I know in our time, the most excellent poet” (94-5). Treading in the territory of the pedant, Puttenham, like Wilson before him, defends against the comparison not only by foregrounding practical ends but also by treating his material in as delightful and as forward-looking a fashion as he can manage. Taking a stand against the “inkhorn terms” of “preachers and schoolmasters” (230), he translates with gusto those rhetorical terms that distinguish the language of the pedant. *Cacozelia*, which E. K. calls “Cacozelon,” Puttenham renders in English as “fond affectation” and glosses as follows:

another intolerable ill manner of speech ... is when we affect new words and phrases other than the good speakers and writers in any language, or than custom, hath allowed; and is the common fault of young scholars not half well-studied before they come from the university or schools, and when they come to their friends, or happen to get some benefice or other promotion in their countries, will seem to coin fine words out of the Latin and to use newfangled speeches, thereby to show themselves among the ignorant the better learned.

(337-8)

One wonders whether Puttenham has in mind here Wilson’s Lincolnshire man and his desired benefice. Regardless, here, as in his consistent efforts to translate rhetorical theory into plain, simple, and delightful English (*ironia* becomes “the dry mock”; *hyperbole*, the “overreacher”) and to illustrate that theory in practice in English poetry, Puttenham presents an idea of the critic that stands in opposition to the light-headed, irrelevant, and alienating practices of the pedant. Like the Greek terms to which he textually opposes his English translations in Book III, the shadow of the pedant glimpsed in this passage and in his redemption of fancy casts Puttenham’s critical practice in a positive light. C. S. Lewis has long since noted that in Puttenham’s hands, “poetry escapes from the lecture room” and “[s]lavish humanism disappears” (433). More recently, scholars have observed Puttenham’s

critical marriage of court and literature the *Arte*'s simultaneous function as both courtesy book and rhetoric manual.¹⁵

It bears noting, however, that Puttenham struggles in his attempt to resist pedantry. After all, he proves less willing than Samuel Daniel to dismiss quantitative meter out of hand. He is often digressive and sometimes lingers over history and literary precedent. Such features of the work express the struggle involved in the attempts of Puttenham and other English critics of his age to carve out a space for English poetry between the excesses of what he calls "scholarly affectation" (382) and the various camps of *misomousoi*: those "all holy and mortified to the world and therefore esteeming nothing that savoureth not of theology," those "altogether grave and worldly and therefore caring for nothing but matters of policy and discourses of estate," and those "all given to thrift and passing for none art that is not gainful and lucrative" (199). If poetry is vanity, he suggests in Book II, then all is vanity, a fact he would rather acknowledge with the laughter of Democritus than the tears of Heraclitus (199-200).

Puttenham's efforts to make poetry practical by demonstrating the ease and benefit of its English application annexes criticism onto a broader cultural development of the sixteenth century in England. Signs of this development begin to appear as early as More's *Utopia* and the debate it stages between the demands of rational idealism on the one hand and an impulse toward political action on the other. Acknowledging More's unique willingness to pursue the political implications of humanist thinking on the misuse of private property has led Quentin Skinner to read *Utopia* as a "humanist critique of humanism" (1.257). Whereas his fellow humanists had by and large refrained from translating learning into advocacy for social change, More presents in Book II of *Utopia* "a solution – the only

¹⁵ See, for instance, Daniel Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978), pp. 50-69.

possible solution – to the social evils he had already outlined in Book I” (1.262). David Norbrook reads the work in light of a sixteenth-century struggle between the ideals of what he calls “radical humanism” and the restrictive circumstances of political reality. The skepticism that Morus expresses regarding the viability of a communist society in practice reflects a growing investment in “practical compromise” among humanists (25). More’s work marks an incipient trend toward action and away from mere contemplation.

This trend continues through the end of the sixteenth century, its scope quickly extending beyond the relatively limited context of humanism with the help of the Protestant Reformation. A varied host of sixteenth-century thinkers and writers contributed to what Hiram Haydn has called the “counter-Renaissance,” “a vast intellectual conflict, latent since the thirteenth century” (14) and predicated in part upon calling into question the value of learning altogether.¹⁶ In response to the optimistic confidence of the Thomists in the human intellect and of the humanists in reason, Luther severs the relationship between reason and faith, and Montaigne exclaims, “Que sais-je?” What was perceived as intellectual arrogance gives way to the exaltation of humility and inspires a return to first principles guided by a new set of ideals: “Practice and fact, not theory; the particular, not the universal; the intuitive or volitional or empirical, not the speculative or intellectual or logical” (85). This path leads precipitously to Bacon, whose overhaul of learning with the goal of repairing the damage of the Fall and relieving man’s estate marks the beginning of what Haydn calls the “scientific reformation.” This necessarily reductive sketch of Haydn’s ambitious argument can help us to contextualize the metacritical debate at hand. That Puttenham’s attempts to make poetry practical coincide with his attempts to make it English begins to make sense in light of the

¹⁶ For the full account, which I draw upon in the sentences that follow, see Haydn, pp. 76-130.

strife that had been stirred up between learning and action and chronicled in other contemporary English works.

So too does Samuel Daniel's decision to stage in verse an acrimonious debate between a lover of poetry and a lover of the world in *Musophilus* (1599). Through the latter interlocutor, Philocosmus, Daniel gives voice to the most salient and threatening claims of his age against learning and poetry, his "now condemned Art" ("To ... Fulke Greuill" 12).¹⁷ Philocosmus charges Musophilus with a fondness ill suited to the character of what he calls the "busie world" (10): "Other delights then these, other desires / This wiser profit-seeking Age requires" (12-13). To dally with poetry and learning is to indulge singularity and to rebel against both "Nature and Societie" (83). Philocosmus urges Musophilus instead to "Be new with mens affections that are new" (77). He indicts poetry not with the vanity of Ecclesiastes, as Agrippa had, but with practical inutility, for it neither "Feeds ... [the poet's] race" nor "makes his house more faire" (46-7). Poets who seek to gain everlasting fame – a risibly futile effort in the "vnknowne" speech (428) of a "scarce discerned Ile" (427) – wind up gaining only the title of "Leuitie" (71). Widening the scope of his attack to include rhetoric and other arts, Philocosmus goes even further:

Men finde, that action is another thing,
Then what they in discoursing papers reade:
The worlds affaires require in managing,
More Artes then those wherein you Clerkes proceede:
Whilst timorous Knowledge stands considering,
Audacious Ignorance hath done the deede;
For who knowes most, the more he knowes to doubt,
The least discourse is commonly most stout.
This sweet inchaunting Knowledge turnes you cleene
Out from the fields of naturall delight,
And makes you hide, vnwilling to be seene
In th'open concourse of a publike sight:
This skill, wherewith you haue so cunning beene,
Vnsinues all your powres, vnmans you quite.

¹⁷ All citations of *Musophilus* refer to line numbers in the Grosart edition of Daniel's works.

Publike societie and commerce of men
Require another grace, another port:
This Eloquence, these Rymes, these Phrases then,
Begot in shades, doe serue vs in no sort;
Th'vnmateriall swellings of your Pen
Touch not the spirit that action doth import

(486-505)

Learning not only makes men unfit for action, miring them in discourse while Ignorance eagerly seizes its opportunity; it also enervates them and alienates them from public society. Philocosmus strikes at the etiological origin of the “unmateriality” of the fruits of Musophilus’s art by indicating that they are “Begot in shades.” That which is produced in alienation from and without regard to “Publike societie and commerce of men” will never serve it. Through these charges, Daniel provides a clear picture of the growing antagonism between learning and practical interests at the end of the sixteenth century in England.

Musophilus, whose responses disproportionately outweigh the claims of his interlocutor in terms of space, tellingly vacillates between idealistic indifference to the “mist of earth” (89) and studied attempts to answer Philocosmus directly by establishing the practical value of learning. He begins by arguing for the delight of poetry and rehearsing the familiar critical trope of the poet’s unique access to everlasting fame. His second speech emphasizes the vanity of materiality and argues that it is the honor of the poet to serve virtue rather than material gain. In some of the most evocative lines in all of Renaissance poetry, he celebrates the ability of poetry to communicate across vast expanses of time and space. If his readership should be limited to England – nay, to a single reader – it would be readership enough for him. These arguments oppose the grounded materialism of Philocosmus with high idealism.

Yet he gradually descends to earth and to the world of business, first by arguing that the degradation of learning and the dissolution of order began with the Protestant

Reformation (689-778) and, second, by meeting Philocosmus head-on with the claim that “true knowledge can both speak and do” (836). Learning not only serves the state; it serves the state best: “the weapons of the minde / Are states best strengths, and kingdomes chiefest grace” (841-2). In the often excerpted closing peroration on “heauenly Eloquence,” Musophilus trades abstraction for practicality. What begins as an argument for the might of the pen over that of the sword quickly turns to matters of imperial interest as Musophilus considers “to what strange shores / This gaine of our best glory shall be sent” (958-9). Nations in the “yet vnformed Occident” may one day be refined by English eloquence (961-2); moreover, they may be maintained and controlled by it. Daniel links political power directly to rhetorical prowess, and rhetorical prowess directly to poetry, “mother of this force” (969). *Musophilus* demonstrates that in 1599, persuasion could not depend upon the subversion of worldly interests to timeless ideals. Rather, it demanded a commitment to the growing interests of the world of business.

Daniel may have been writing in response to the thoughts of friend and dedicatee Fulke Greville, whose *Treatie of Humane Learning* (pub. 1633),¹⁸ a skeptical assessment of the arts and sciences in sixains, is, for all of its obvious differences from Daniel’s work, equally effective at registering the pragmatic tide of late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. Following Agrippa, who had boldly if playfully claimed of the arts and sciences, “this is the very pestilence, that putteth all mankinde to ruine, the which chaseth awaie all Innocencie, and hath made vs subiecte to so many kindes of sinne, and to death also,”¹⁹ Greville roots the vanity of human learning in the flaws of human nature, and the flaws of human nature in the Fall. Yet he leaves behind both Agrippa’s severity and his irony.

¹⁸ The date of composition is unknown, but Kelly A. Quinn has recently argued that the *Treatie* represents “an articulation of views long held or long in development” (430).

¹⁹ *Of the Vanitie and Uncertaintie of Artes and Sciences*, tr. James Sanford (London: 1569), sig. 4^r.

Whereas Agrippa had presented an alternative to vanity in the wisdom of innocent and childlike (or ass-like) humility, Greville, writing in and speaking for another age, proposes a “reformation” of learning predicated upon practical ends.

Though initially he sounds like a more pious version of Philocosmus, contrasting living with learning (“*Life* is the *Wisdome*, *Art* is but the *letter*” [35]²⁰) and presenting learning, as Philocosmus had, as “Engins that did vn-man the mindes of men / From action, to seeke glorie in a den” (42); though his assessment of learning as “A *Rhapsody* of questions controverted” (49) inevitably brings to mind Montaigne’s “perpetual confession of ignorance”; he nevertheless makes it clear that ignorance is not the solution to vanity – “Man must not therefore rashly Science scorne” (62) – but proposes instead the simplification and practical application of learning:

The World should therefore her instructions draw
Backe vnto life, and actions, whence they came;
That practise, which gaue being, might giue law,
To make them short, cleare, fruitful vnto man

(71)

The “sleepy speculation” (82) of the scholastics must give way to “*Councels*” and “*Synods*” aimed at preserving unity and concealing divine mystery (82-9). The terms of grammar should be reduced to “good” and “evil” (103). Rhetoric should be geared away from sophism toward plain speech (107-10). Music should be used to stir devotion at church and heroism in battle, and poetry should instruct Nature “in a glasse ... how to fashion / Her selfe againe, by the balancing of passion” (114). Mathematics should relinquish the abstract in favor of “Buildings of all kinds; / Ships, Houses, Halls, for humane policy” (121). The

²⁰ Citations of the *Treatie* refer to stanza numbers of the edition printed in Greville, *Certaine*.

ends of Greville's proposed reformations are equally moral and practical, geared toward both "true obedience" (138) and "the good of all" (143).

The trial of learning underway in the late sixteenth century, and its implication in the invention of the English critic, finds expression in both the academic and the popular drama of the day. At the top of the list in the former category stand the *Parnassus Plays* (c. 1598-1602), a trilogy of increasingly satirical, and decreasingly allegorical, comedies on the state of learning in England that were produced as Christmas entertainment at St. John's College, Cambridge. The plays follow Philomusus and Studioso on their ill-fated journey to and from Parnassus, or Cambridge. We witness their transformation from innocent and ambitious young students to jaded and alienated scholars. As the two seek their way, they encounter a host of capital-C characters from Amoretto, the poetry-mad disciple of the Ovid of the *Amores*, to Ingenioso, the disillusioned scholar turned satirist who is generally believed to represent Thomas Nashe.

Philomusus and Studioso first encounter Ingenioso in the *Pilgrimage to Parnassus*. They are coming up as he is coming down, and he strongly discourages their journey: "Turne home againe, vnless youe meane to be *vacui viatores*, and to curse youre wittless heades in youre oulde age for takinge themselues to no better trades in there youthe" (634-6).²¹ Parnassus will only make them poor, for learning has fallen on hard times:

Why, our emptie handed sattine sutes doe make more accounte of some foggie faulkner, than of a wittie scholler, had rather rewarde a man for setting of a hayre than a man of wit for making of a poeme Why, Newman the cobbler will leaue large legacies to his hairees, while the posteritie of *humanissimi auditores* and *esse posse videatur* must be faine to be kept by the parishe.

(614-34)

²¹ Citations of the *Parnassus Plays* refer to line numbers in the Leishman edition.

Despite these grim observations, the young pair resolve to press on and leave Ingenioso agreeing to disagree. He warns them against becoming schoolmasters or pedants, and they in turn warn him against becoming a pamphleteer, the author(s) thus indicating the very Scylla and Charybdis between which the English critic must sail in these two chapters.

We soon find both threats realized. In the first part of the *Return from Parnassus*, necessity drives Ingenioso to become a pamphleteer, and Philomusus and Studioso, having left Parnassus in a huff, pursue their respective fortunes as a sexton and a private tutor. By the end of the play, Philomusus has lost his job for having let a dog into the parish church, and Studioso has lost his for refusing to sit below a servant. At the conclusion of the final entry in the trilogy, the second part of the *Return from Parnassus*, they abandon their studies and their attempts to turn their studies to profit in London, and pursue a more humble life as shepherds. The play thus presents the now familiar story of the failure and dismissal of the pedant from the pedant's perspective. Consiliodorus, father to Philomusus and uncle to Studioso, quite understandably laments his having paid the boys' way to Parnassus in an age of shortsighted if pragmatic priorities: "Mechanicke artes may smile, there followers laughe, / But liberall artes bewaile there destinie" (1070-1). Meanwhile, Ingenioso, frustrated at length in his attempts to secure patronage, vows to become a "Satyrist" (l. 1468) and walks onstage in the second part of the *Return from Parnassus* reading Juvenal: "*Difficile est, Satyram non scribere*" (84).

On the popular stage, Shakespeare's *Love's Labour's Lost* (c. 1593-5) stages its own trial of learning. The King of Navarre and his entourage court pedantry by isolating themselves from the world of experience and founding an academy in pursuit of "Things hid and barred ... from common sense" (1.1.57). Love and marriage, standing here as in *The Lady of May* for the world of business to which such pedantry stands opposed, soon weed

their way through the gates of Navarre's academy with the arrival of the Princess of France and her attendants, making hypocrites of the oath-bound academics. Weighed in the scales of wisdom, book learning fails to measure up:

They [women] are the books, the arts, the academes
That show, contain, and nourish all the world,
Else none at all in aught proves excellent.

(4.3.326-8)

Playing satirist to the pedants of Navarre's academy, the women fluster the men as the Marescalco flusters Aretino's Pedante by opposing rote learning with the uncontrollable vagaries of experience. Simply by trading masks and appearing other than they are, they expose the surface learning²² of the men, who have disguised themselves as Muscovites, and reduce their high-flown rhetoric to comedy. The gaffe leads Biron to swear off "Figures pedantical" (5.2.408). As with Puttenham, however, reform presents a struggle: "Bear with me, I am sick. / I'll leave it by degrees" (5.2.418-9). Alas, Biron leaves it too late. If love found the academy unprepared, death – the very best that experience has to offer in its attempt to flummox learning – finds it helpless at the end of the play. Opportunity slips away, in the words of Philocosmus, "Whilst timorous Knowledge stands considering." Novelty refuses to yield to precedent. "Our wooing," Biron observes, "doth not end like an old play" (5.2.851).

Shakespeare thus puts a decidedly new spin on the now familiar trope of the failure of the pedant in the practical world. He garnishes this dish with the elaborate inutility of Holofernes, a formal stage pedant in the tradition of Rombus and the Pedante. Having, as Moth has it, "been at a great feast of languages and stolen the scraps" (5.1.34-5), Holofernes, like the Pedante, inspires comic misapprehensions with his macaronic tongue ("haud credo"

²² Cf. Graf: "ma dei poeti ha colto la parola, non l'anima, degli oratori il suono, non le ragioni, dei filosofi tutto il più le sentenze, non le larghe e poderose intuizioni" (174).

becomes “old grey doe”). Toward the play’s conclusion, Shakespeare sets the reformed academics loose upon the pedant, marking their redemption by employing them as satirists and Holofernes as their target, a constitutive other for the kind of practical wisdom that trades contemplation for action.

It has been the ongoing project of one cabal of Shakespeareans to discover an “original” for Holofernes in sixteenth-century England. Candidates have included John Florio,²³ George Chapman,²⁴ Gabriel Harvey,²⁵ and Richard Mulcaster.²⁶ At the same time, wagers have been made as to the true identity of the braggart Don Armado and his satirical page, Moth, and the true significance of those character names which Shakespeare has drawn from some of the key players in the French Civil War. Like that of *The Parnassus Plays* – and, as we shall see, *The Shepheardes Calender* – the topicality of this curious comedy²⁷ reveals an attempt on the part of the dramatist to resist the kind of alienation sought by Navarre and his academy. However seriously we take its topicality, however directly we choose to believe

²³ See Yates, pp. 13-17, 34-9, 48-9.

²⁴ See Arthur Acheson, *Shakespeare and the Rival Poet* (London: John Lane, 1903), pp. 100-11 and J. M. Robertson, *Shakespeare and Chapman* (1917; Folcroft, PA: Folcroft Editions, 1976), pp. 110-20.

²⁵ See Yates, pp. 80-82.

²⁶ See pp. 31-5 in Richard L. DeMolen, “Richard Mulcaster and the Elizabethan Theatre,” *Theatre Survey: The American Journal of Theatre History*, 13 (1972), 28-41.

²⁷ Mary Ellen Lamb provides a helpful overview of the scholarly pursuit of topicality in the play (83-5). Dividing the tradition into three phases, she begins with late 19th-century scholars such as Sidney Lee who examined potential connections between Shakespeare’s characters and their namesakes with “impressive historical knowledge and balanced good sense” (83). From here, she moves to the second phase of topical criticism, which culminated in Frances Yates’s *A Study of Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1936) and treated the play as a “competitive game, a cross between a crossword puzzle and a tennis match, performed for the diversion of bejewelled courtiers exchanging amused glances as they recognized the references in the play to their acquaintances” (84). Finally, in the early 1980s, Lamb observes a return to a more balanced and general pursuit of topicality, which she herself embraces. She persuasively opposes the notion that the topicality of the play necessarily makes its appeal exclusively “aristocratic.” Certainly, as we have seen, the scope of the trial of learning, at least, was not limited to court.

it addresses itself to the School of Night or the Harvey-Nashe controversy, we cannot fail to recognize Shakespeare's effort to draw together on- and off-stage worlds in this play. The trial of learning, like the French Civil War, was a hot topic in the 1590s, and the young playwright quite pragmatically uses it to his advantage. He presents, doubtless to the delight of the world of business, a dramatization of the practical concerns of that world (e.g., land treaties, political alliances) impinging upon and ultimately overwhelming the supermundane and insular concerns of learning.

Having made a sudden shift from the party of learning to the party of love, Biron marvels at his transformation:

And I, forsooth, in love – I that have been love's whip,
A very beadle to a humorous sigh,
A critic, nay, a night-watch constable,
A domineering pedant o'er the boy,
Than whom no mortal so magnificent.

(4.1.159-63)

On the surface, these lines employ the customary violence of the pedant²⁸ as an expression of Biron's quondam tendency to rail at the humorous (pun intended) sighs of those afflicted by love. At another level, however, by opposing love and pedantry, these lines draw upon and reinforce the almost semiotic function of that odd couple in expressing the growing tension between learning and more practical interests, whatever they may be, in sixteenth-century England. This tension guides *Love's Labour's Lost* on any number of levels from plot to subplot. Presented with some of Biron's amatory verse in the next scene, Holofernes overlooks its content completely, as if blind to that ineffable quality of the beloved that leaves rhetoric dumb (4.3.234-5) and which Biron signals metonymically in terms of the eyes: "but for her eye I would not love her" (4.3.8). Focusing instead on form, the domain of the

²⁸ See Graf, pp. 183-5.

pedant, to be sure, Holofernes faults the verse for its lack of the “elegancy,” “facility,” and “golden cadence” of Ovid (4.2.114-5). We find the critic – in this scene as in the lines above – caught in the middle. By aligning the critic with the pedant, Shakespeare registers the very tendency against which modern English critics would have to struggle in their attempt to distinguish criticism from pedantry.

IV. The Critical Pedant

The “ambition” of the pedant, as Overbury observes in his treatment of the character, “is *Criticisme*” (E8^r). From the Pedante’s assessment of the best Italian poets to Holofernes’ harsh judgment of Biron’s billet-doux, the critic has been implicated in the satirical undoing of the pedant. That implication becomes explicit as critics themselves pick up on and appropriate, from drama and elsewhere, the strategy of aligning themselves with the increasingly practical interests of an increasingly practical-minded world by opposing themselves to the figure of the pedant. In the context of criticism, the pedant becomes a means for poets metacritically to establish the irrelevance of their most pedantic critics and to emphasize the practical ends of what John Marston calls “modern poesy.” At the same time, as a negative model of the critic, the pedant provides an apophatic expression of proper critical practice. If it fails to make the details of that practice clear or specific, the iteration of a job poorly done nevertheless registers the possibility, and takes steps toward the realization, of a job well done. In however oblique a fashion, whether with ambivalent irony or biting satire, modern critics turn the pedant against himself in an attempt to intercede and regulate relations between readers, poets, and critics – readers who may fail to recognize the utility of modern poetry, poets who may fail to recognize the utility of criticism, and critics who may fail to recognize the utility of utility.

Toward the very end of the sixteenth century, we find John Marston at once testifying to the familiarity of the notion of the critical pedant and enriching the legacy of that character in *The Scourge of Villainy* (1598). In the second poem of this collection of satires, “In Lectores prorsus indignos,” Marston surveys a host of unwelcome readers as the speaker undergoes a *psychomachia* over whether to grant them access to his verse. The speaker ultimately – and ironically – takes solace in their misreading, which is dependable if nothing else:

Nay then, come all...
Read all, view all; even with my full consent,
So you will know that which I never meant;
So you will ne’er conceive, and yet dispraise
That which you ne’er conceived...

(61-66)²⁹

As the speaker addresses an imaginary audience of *lectores indignos*, Marston offers his actual audience a lesson in good reading by way of bad. Bad reading applies its own meaning, and bad readers judge before they understand. Yet the dependability of bad readers in their misreading permits Marston to construct a satirico-critical formula by which the glory of the poet is advanced by the detraction of a bad reader (73-9). Among these bad readers, whose dispraise dignifies his satire (74), Marston includes the “spruce pedant” (77).

We get a more detailed picture of the critical pedant in the second verse paragraph of “Satire IX”:

Yon Athens’ ape (that can but simp’ringly
Yaul “*Auditores humanissimi!*”
Bound to some servile imitation,
Can, with much sweat, patch an oration)
Now up he comes, and with his crookèd eye
Presumes to squint on some fair poesy;
And all as thankless as ungrateful Thames,
He slinks away, leaving but reeking steams

²⁹ All citations of Marston refer to the Bullen edition.

Of dungy slime behind. All as ingrate
He useth it as when I satiate
My spaniel's paunch, who straight perfumes the room
With his tail's filth: so this uncivil groom,
Ill-tutor'd pedant, Mortimer's numbers
With muck-pit Esculine filth bescumbers.

(21-34)

Likely taking aim here at his chief satirical adversary, Joseph Hall, who succeeded Gabriel Harvey as University Praelector of Rhetoric at Cambridge (Davenport 196), Marston presents with admirable efficiency a living picture of the pedant and then casts from that picture a critical type. He contains the pedant in general form within the parenthesis of the first four lines, where we find the highly affected (“simp’ringly”), overwrought (“with much sweat”), and precedent-obsessed (“servile imitation”) rhetoric of Rombus, the Pedante, or Holofernes greeting an audience of learned auditors. Of each of these qualities, it is servility that draws Marston’s greatest ire. His utter disdain for pedantic “apes” (11), “mimic slaves” (13), and servile imitators of all kinds speaks as much to the progress-inhibiting aversion of the pedant to innovation as it does to Marston’s own investment in that value, despite the debt he owes to classical satire.

After the parenthesis, when the pedant turns to the judgment of poetry, Marston adds several crucial details to his portrait. With the squint that disfigures his face and limits his view, Marston attributes to the critical pedant a certain singularity – a captious eccentricity that informs, and deforms, his judgment. With the fetid waters of the ungrateful Thames, he indicates the opposition of critical pedantry to productivity and charity. The poet presents his gift, and the critical pedant uses that gift as ungratefully as the speaker’s ill-tutored spaniel uses his dinner. Nourishment is gratuitously rendered into filth. Yet the act of “bescumbering” Drayton’s epistle of Mortimer to Queen Isabell with “muck-pit Esculine filth” also speaks to the pedant’s method of processing all he has read into matter with

which to besmirch all that he will read. Consumption and excretion become one and the same singularly circular and unproductive process. The effect of this type of “modern critic” upon “modern poesy,” both Marston’s terms,³⁰ and the commonwealth at large is contained in the adjective “uncivil,” which expresses not just indecency but opposition to the well-being of the community stemming from a lack of civic virtue.

Later Marston adds to his portrait distinctly Wilsonian notes:

O yon's a pen speaks in a learned vein,
 Deep, past all sense ... This affectation,
 To speak beyond men's apprehension,
 How apish 'tis, when all in fustian suit
 Is cloth'd a huge nothing, all for repute
 Of profound knowledge, when profoundness knows
 There's naught contain'd but only seeming shows!

(55-71)

Marston's critical pedant, like Wilson's pedant, would rather be understood to be learned than simply to be understood. And Marston, like Wilson, chalks up this urge "To speak beyond men's apprehension" to affectation and vanity. Most importantly, both satirists expose the futility of the effort, Wilson by pointing to the inevitable failure of the preposterous letter of the Lincolnshire man and Marston by telling the pedant what the rest of his readership already knows, namely, that "seeming shows," like the Pedante's elaborate oratorical attempt to persuade the Marescalco to marriage, amount to "a huge nothing."

Part of what makes the pedant fail as a reader is the obsession with precedent marked and mocked by so many of his satirists. Marston specifically invokes this feature of the critical type in “Satire VI,” where he laments the squandering of wit in amatory verse and fumes at those misreaders, including Hall, who would read his *Pygmalion* straightforwardly. Marston wrote, he tells us, not “in sad seriousness” (6) but rather

³⁰ See Satire IV l. 83 and Satire VI l. 26 in *The Scourge of Villainy*.

to note the odious spot
And blemish that deforms the lineaments
Of modern poesy's habiliments

(24-6)

and to expose those readers who are so blinded by precedent as to overlook novelty and its nuances altogether. Such readers proclaim that Spenser follows Homer, and Marston, Ovid, without qualification (59-61). Such a reader is Friscus, "that neat gentleman, / That new-discarded academian" (one thinks of Philomusus and Studioso), who reads Persius in this line, Juvenal in that one, and Horace in between (89-100). Marston assesses such affected footnoting as the work of a "lazy eye" (98) and such critics as "big-buzzing little-bodied gnats, / ... tattling echoes, huge-tongued pigmy brats" (101-2).

The sides of the metacritical debate staged by this satire appear clearly drawn. Marston has on his side novelty; a roughness he bills as plain-speak, primarily by opposing it to pedantic obscurity; and an unflinching resolve to write in spite of the indignity of critics like Friscus (110). Friscus and his crew meanwhile side with precedent, hard-won affectation, deliberate obscurity, and the unflappable ability to reduce any attempt at poetic invention to transparent imitation, even if the source is unfamiliar ("Though he ne'er read one line in Juvenal" [97]). These points of opposition threaten to obscure what Marston shares with the discarded "academians" in his crosshairs. After all, Marston pursues his satire by way of Oxford and the Middle Temple. If he himself was not discarded by the academy, he nevertheless discarded his legal studies in favor of the page and the stage. Bearing the stamp of the academy, both Marston and Friscus eagerly court critical authority from different platforms. The fervor of Marston's satirical effort to distinguish himself from Friscus speaks to his recognition of all that he shares with his critical other, an observation we might generally apply to the relation of critic to pedant. In this effort, as in "Satire VI"

and so many of the poems of the *Scourge*, we find him not fearful of being misunderstood but enraged at having already been misunderstood. The critical pedant provides him with a neat and efficient means of setting the record straight.

Metacritical invocations of the pedant thus hinge upon a set of fraught critical tensions between innovation and precedent; inclusion and alienation; functioning, fruitful poetic economies and malfunctioning, fruitless, and even destructive ones. Such tensions figure prominently in *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579), one of the inaugural works of the English Renaissance, which pairs Immerito, the “new Poete” (25),³¹ with E. K., attendant critic and glossator. Equally unknown, their anonymity circularly signaled by their respective noms de plume, Immerito and E. K. are both caught between the opposed attractive forces of fame and namelessness. Each simultaneously attempts to integrate himself into a rich tradition, pastoral poetry on the one hand and learned critical commentary on the other, and in the process to reinvent that tradition. This ambivalence carries over into the poem itself, where the poetic economy of Spenser’s idyll is compromised as the traditional channels of poetic production fall under fire (most notably, as we have seen, in the October eclogue) and the poet renounces his art (“or rather no arte” [128]) and alienates himself from his community.

At the metacritical level, E. K. calls the function, methods, and utility of criticism into question by vacillating between aiding and inhibiting the reader and serving and disserving the poet. He regularly finds himself pinned down in a critical bind between matters of topical relevance, which he can’t satisfactorily reveal or explain, and matters of pedantic irrelevance, which he can but needn’t. Add to this the internal context of Colin’s frustrated love for Rosalind and the external context of the French match, both of which

³¹ All citations of *The Shepheardes Calender* refer to Spenser, *Shorter Poems*.

resist E. K.'s critical eye, and the charge of pedantry, which has so often been made, seems altogether merited. If the dynamic is imperfectly evoked, if we are denied the satisfaction of neatly and consistently applying the labels of pedant and attendant satirist to E. K. and Immerito, the bearing of the metacritical debate embodied by these two figures upon *The Shepheardes Calender* is nonetheless unmistakable.

The true identity of E. K. has proven to be one of the most intractable and tenacious questions of Spenser scholarship. The once common solution of identifying E. K. as Edward Kirke,³² a sizar several years Spenser's junior at Cambridge, has yielded in recent research to arguments that more plausibly identify E. K. as a version of Spenser himself or some combination of Spenser and Gabriel Harvey.³³ Yet whether we attribute the commentary to Spenser or to someone else; whether we translate the given name of its author as Edward Kirke, Edmund Kalendarius,³⁴ Edmund of Kent,³⁵ Edmundus Kedemon (a literal Hellenization of *spencer* or steward),³⁶ or a witty play upon the words *eke* or *ecce*,³⁷ whether we take it as an earnest and helpful attempt to guide the reader and defend the poet,³⁸ one component of a "fictional imitation of a humanist edition of classical texts" (McCanles, "Document," 6), or as a parodic imitation of Marc-Antoine Muret's commentary on the *Amours* of Ronsard – whoever stands behind the commentary and whatever his

³² See Cornelius, pp. 5-6, and Schleiner, pp. 377-8.

³³ See, for instance, Carroll, Schleiner, Steinberg, and Waldman.

³⁴ See Kuerstiner.

³⁵ See Schleiner.

³⁶ See Waldman.

³⁷ See Carroll.

³⁸ See Cornelius.

intentions may have been, the fact remains that glossator and poet often stand in opposition, a fact noted by all but the most stalwart champions of E. K.

Just as the poets within the poem articulate what we might call poetic trouble, so at the margins of the poem E. K. generates what David Norbrook has called “an atmosphere of scepticism and uncertainty” (68). Several critics have explained the opposition between E. K. and Immerito in terms of political camouflage. His misreadings, according to this argument, serve as screens for the most sensitive topical matter in the poem.³⁹ Without discounting that political function, I would argue that at a metacritical level, E. K.’s misreadings also serve to dramatize a familiar kind of pedantry that overlooks even the most salient topical content and thus leaves to question the relevance and utility of modern poetry. If E. K. protects the poem from the kind of political application that might lead to censorship or something worse, at the same time, as a critical vice, he obliquely satirizes those readers and critics who would fail to recognize the poem’s thinly veiled attempt to involve itself in contemporary events. This metacritical reading draws strength from the inconsistency that often gets washed out as critics emphasize E. K.’s missteps at the expense of his successes, or vice versa. The inconsistency of E. K.’s commentary registers the metacritical struggle he undergoes as glossator. His vacillations suggest flagging confidence and give the reader the sense that he recognizes the limitations of his own methodology.

“VNCOVTHE VNKISTE” (25), begins E. K. in his prefatory epistle to Gabriel Harvey. Those two words contain the chief ends of the epistle, if not the poem on the whole: making the “uncouthe” or unknown known, the “straunge” familiar, the old “new,” and the new beloved. His decision to introduce that project by invoking Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, at once established precedent and unnerving novelty, old and new, is apt and

³⁹ See, for instance, Cornelius, pp. 46-7; Lewis, p. 362; Norbrook, pp. 66-7; and Schleiner, pp. 381, 405.

makes his critical dilemma clear. E. K. wagers that of the “many thinges which in [Immerito] be straunge,” his language “will seeme the straungest, the words them selues being so auncient, the knitting of them so short and intricate, and the whole Periode and compasse of speache so delightsome for the roundnesse, and so grave for the straungeness” (25). Ironically, Spenser’s deliberate use of antique, Chaucerian language – words “long time out of vse and almost cleare disherited” (27) – contributes significantly to the apparent newness of the new poet, which E. K. both celebrates and defends.

E. K.’s means of celebrating and defending this element of the new poet’s style begin to reveal his ambivalence as a critic and his troubled relationship with the critical pedant. On the one hand, he memorably invokes *concordia discors* by comparing Spenser’s balance of rough language and refined expression to the balance of harsh, craggy backgrounds and delicate subjects in Renaissance portraiture. He emphasizes the ironic novelty of Immerito’s antique language by aligning it with the equally novel critical effort, inaugurated by writers such as Ascham and Campion, to refine English and prove it “ful enough for prose and stately enough for verse” (27). Those critics who “rashly blame” Immerito for his use of antique words misjudge him by overlooking this practical aim or “bent” of his poetry (27). E. K. brandishes a three-pronged critique of critics who, in disdaining the enrichment of English from its ancestral coffers, alienate themselves from their mother tongue, condemn what they do not understand, and show so little respect for English that they will not see it beautified. Yet despite these bold, forward-looking arguments, E. K. cannot resist citing a classical precedent for backward-looking innovation – a claim that seems less permissive the better we get to know him. He defends Immerito’s efforts by defending Livy and Sallust from the charge (made by Valla and other misguided critics) of affecting antiquity: “I am of the opinion, and eke the best learned are of the lyke, that those auncient solemne wordes are

a great ornament both in the one and in the other” (26). Here E. K. distinguishes the new poet from “the rakehellye route of our ragged rymers” (28) with the unique tightness of his verse; there he sets him in step with a host of pastoral precedents from Theocritus to Sannazzaro, “whose foting this Author euery where followeth” (29).

Through the critical lens provided by E. K., we find novelty and precedent, topicality and literary convention, and individual and community at loggerheads in both poem and commentary. He explains his duty as glossator as “thexposition of old wordes and harder phrases” yet immediately observes that this “maner of glosing and commenting, well I wote, wil seeme straunge and rare in our tongue” (29). This new glossing of old words aims to prevent the poem’s “many excellent and proper deuises both in wordes and matter” from passing “vnknownen” or unmarked. By this means, the English might prove themselves “equal to the learned of other nations” (29). Yet curiously, by his own report, it is not learning but rather “familiar acquaintance” with the poet that has made him privy to the “secret meaning” of the eclogues (29).

The “generall argument” provided after the epistle to Harvey intensifies these metacritical tensions and reveals their bearing upon the relationship between critic and poet. E. K. himself appears to acknowledge as much. He addresses two critical points that originate in the poem but quickly lead him into pedantic digressions which threaten to set him at odds with the poet. First, addressing the poet’s use of “aeglogue” rather than “eclogue,” he takes issue with those critics who “would make vs belecue that they are more rightly termed Eclogai, as they would say, extraordinary discourses of vnnecessarie matter, which difinition albe in substaunce and meaning it agree with the nature of the thing, yet nowhit answereth with the αναλυσις and interpretation of the word” (32). Such critics get the “unnecessary matter” of eclogues right – hardly a vote of confidence in the content of

the poems to come – while getting the name wrong, and it is the name that matters to E. K. The (false) root of the word in “*αῖγ-*” or “goat” makes the goatherds of Theocritus more appropriate than the shepherds of Virgil. E. K. stops just short of faulting Immerito for employing shepherds rather than goatherds, choosing instead to focus on his appropriate use of “aeglogue”: “though indeede few Goteheards haue to do herein, nethless [he] doubteth not to cal them by the vsed and best knowen name” (32). Then, as if suddenly made aware of his digression, he refrains from pursuing the matter further: “Other curious discourses hereof I reserue to greater occasion” (32). His own marking of his curious discourse as such invites the reader to do the same.

E. K. next takes up the poet’s decision to begin his calendar in January. This occasions an even longer and more wide-ranging digression into the history of the Julian calendar. E. K. appeals to Macrobius and touches upon astrology, the birth of Christ, the perfection of the calendar under Julius Caesar, and Jewish and Egyptian calendrical practices. The tone of the digression is unmistakable, its terms advisedly and admittedly “learned”:

For from Iulius Caesar, who first obserued the leape yeere which he called Bissextilem Annum, and brought in to a more certain course the odde wandring dayes which of the Greekes were called *υπερβαινοντες* of the Romanes intercalares (for in such matter of learning I am forced to vse the termes of the learned) the monethes haue bene nombred xij....

(33-4)

At the end of the digression, turning back to the poem at hand, the prepared contrast emerges: “But our Authour respecting nether the subtiltie of thone parte, nor the antiquitie of thother, thinketh it fittest according to the simplicitie of commen vnderstanding, to begin with Ianuarie, wening it perhaps no decorum, that Shepheard should be seene in matter of so deepe insight, or canuase a case of so doubtful iudgment” (34). With this assessment of Immerito, which places subtlety, antiquity, indecorum, and the critic on the one side and

simplicity, modernity, decorum, and the new poet on the other, E. K. makes explicit what his pedantic digressions had as yet only implied. The “generall argument” sketches a critical divide, an ironically inverted metacritical facet of what Michael McCanles has called “a historical and typographical gulf” (7) between poet and critic, which E. K. will navigate with some difficulty throughout his commentary.

E. K.’s commentary ranges from the helpful to the misleading and from the cryptically topical to the pedantically irrelevant. It is his habit never to allow one word to suffice where ten will do, a trait that in practice recalls the loquacity of Rombus, the Pedante, and Wilson’s Lincolnshire man. He somewhat desultorily glosses antique words, here offering interpretive commentary on their use and there commentary on something else entirely. We find him in his gloss of the word “couthe” in the January eclogue boasting about the fact that Gabriel Harvey has lent him a manuscript copy of Smith’s *De Republica Anglorum* (38 n. 10). Sometimes he simply admires, stopping to observe “a pretie allegory” (154 n. 57) or “a prety Epanorthosis” (39 n. 61). If the vocabulary employed in such rhetorical observations inevitably brings the pedant to mind, they no less successfully illustrate the skill of the poet, at least at the surface level of form. Elsewhere, however, E. K. disapproves, now indirectly, as when he notes “A straunge manner of speaking” (66 n. 17) in his April gloss, and now directly, as when he criticizes the alliteration in one line of the October eclogue: “I think this playing with the letter to be rather a fault then a figure, aswel in our English tongue, as it hath bene alwayes in the Latine, called Cacozelon” (136 n. 96). These quick shifts in focus and motive establish E. K. as an independent agent, a man whose thoughts on book collecting and alliteration may or may not align with or even pertain to those of the reader or the poet.

E. K. often leads the reader backwards, identifying precedents and points of origin and drawing comparisons between the new poet and older poetry. Beyond tying the occasional phrase back to Virgil, Horace, or Mantuan, he identifies Chaucer as the source of the tale of the oak and the briar in the February eclogue and Aesop as the source of the fox fable in the May eclogue. He links the March and October eclogues to Theocritus and the August eclogue to both Theocritus and the third and seventh eclogues of Virgil. This attention to precedent, of which I have provided but a glimpse, surely honors the poet's learning, revealing its scope to learned and unlearned reader alike. Yet it also risks overshadowing the innovation of the new poet in bringing together ancient and modern.

Wittingly or no, E. K. reveals the risk of succumbing to the undertow of precedence in the frequency with which his gestures in that direction lead him into digression. Those digressions, here as in the prefatory materials, teach the reader more about the glossator than they do about the poem. Thomalin's claim to have been struck "in the heele" (97) by Cupid's arrow in the March eclogue inspires a digression that leads from Homer's account of Thetis dunking Achilles to an overview of the anatomical makeup of the heel drawn from Hippocrates (58 n. 97). An overlong gloss linking "Swain" to Cupid in the March eclogue ends with E. K. stopping himself, as he had in the "general argument," and directing the reader elsewhere for more information, namely, to "Propertius, or Moschus his Idyllion of wandring loue, being now most excellently translated into Latine by the singuler learned man Angelus Politianus: whych worke I haue seene amongst other of thys Poets doings, very wel translated also into Englishe Rymes" (57-8 n. 79). If he saves himself here from losing track of the poem at hand by advertising another work by the same poet, he recovers less gracefully in the June gloss, where an altogether unnecessary gloss of the word "Paradise" leads to a conjectural digression on the geographical location of Eden (91 n. 10). The trend

continues in the July gloss, where E. K. glosses “loorde” as “Lorde” and follows his whimsy to Holinshed’s etymology of “Lurdane” and the etiquette of bridge-crossing in the time of the first Danish invasion (103 n. 33).⁴⁰ But surely the most remarkable example of E. K.’s pedantic tendency to be led into digression by a predilection for rooting is the unforgettable gloss of “Friendly faeries” in the June eclogue, which locates the origin of elves and goblins in the demonization of Florentine Guelphs and Ghibbelines (92 n. 25).

Working in the other direction, drawing connections between the antique shepherds of Immerito’s pastoral with current figures and events, E. K. appears less eager and less confident. Again, this is not to say that he utterly fails in his attempts to reveal the topical relevance of *The Shepheardes Calender*. His vacillations dramatize a metacritical struggle, and the struggle is the message. Through his limited successes as a modern critic, the reader sees the possibilities of socially invested poetry and criticism; through his missteps as a critical pedant, the reader sees those possibilities frustrated. E. K. confidently reveals veiled allusions to Leicester, Elizabeth I, and Henry VIII. Without him, the reader might not have known so readily that the new poet “secretly shadoweth himself” under the persona of Colin Clout (38 n. 1). Yet whereas E. K. appears to be most interested in the precedent of Virgil/Tityrus and treats the Skelton reference built into the name as a coincidence – “yet have I sene a Poesie of M. Skeltons under that title” (38 n. 1) – other readers might be more likely to take stock in the new poet’s invocation of a noted English ecclesiastical satirist. Here the mechanics of political and metacritical readings of E. K. as a screen or vice align: the savvy reader is quick to snatch up the loose end that E. K. encourages the bad reader by example to drop, and the political implications of “Colin Clout” as well as the topical implications and practical ends of modern pastoral come into view.

⁴⁰ The reference to Holinshed is McCabe’s. See Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, p. 547 n. 33.

This struggle between topicality and pedantic irrelevance continues throughout the poem. E. K. stands on the verge of revealing the true identity of Hobbinol in the January gloss, but he postpones the revelation until September (where it occasions welcome if irrelevant praise of Harvey-Hobbinol's works), choosing for the moment to defend Platonic love instead with reference to Plato, Xenophon, and Maximus of Tyre (38-9 n. 59). In the same gloss, which provides us with an introduction to E. K. as glossator, he similarly winks toward the true identity of Rosalinde. But before we can learn what he knows, or whether he knows anything at all, he gets sidetracked into accruing classical precedents of shadowed or veiled lovers. The confusion surrounding Rosalinde continues in the gloss to the April eclogue. There E. K. seems newly confused about certain aspects of Colin's identity (namely his relationship to a certain "Southern noble man" [66 n. 21]) and rejects the poet's suggestion that Rosalinde is any low "Widowes daughter" (26) before once again straying from the promise of topical relevance to an irrelevant digression upon Stesichorus (66 n. 26). We are told that the figure of Menalcas in the June eclogue stands for "a person unknowne and secrete" but not which person (93 n. 102). E. K. is unsure who Perigot stands for in the August eclogue, but not as unsure as his bewildered readers. For "if it be, who is supposed, his love deserueth no lesse prayse, then he giueth her" (115 n. 53). After unmasking Hobbinol as Gabriel Harvey, E. K. alludes to other friends and acquaintances represented by other shepherds in the poem without giving the reader any specifics (126 n. 176). He suggests in his argument to the March eclogue that Thomalin figures "some secrete freend" (52), yet he fails to confirm the conjecture or to offer a suggestion as to who that friend might be. The Cuddie of the October eclogue may or may not represent "the author selfe" (133 n. 1). E. K. frankly admits in the argument to the November eclogue that despite having put the question to Immerito himself, he has no idea whom the poet represents in

Dido (138). But if Immerito can bar E. K. from this bit of topical knowledge, he cannot bar him from identifying the eclogue as an imitation of Clement Marot's *Eglogue sur le Trépas de ma Dame Loyse de Savoye* (1531). Reaching a topical dead-end, E. K. plays to his strengths. The locked knees that he so often suffers in his attempts to walk forward make him all the more eager to spring backward.

At once confirming the political reading of E. K. as screen and the metacritical reading of E. K. as a critical vice, the more salient and momentous the topical resonances and practical ends of *The Shepheardes Calender* become, the more thoroughly he seems to overlook them. He rejects topical relevance outright ("any secrete or particular purpose" [40]) at the very outset of the February eclogue despite clear associations between the briar and Elizabeth and the oak and popish superstition, the latter of which he goes on to note in his gloss (50 n. 209). He identifies Eliza as Elizabeth I in the argument to the April eclogue yet makes no mention of the proposed marriage of this "flowre of Virgins" (48) to Alençon. He consistently inhibits topical application in the moral eclogues by glossing ecclesiastical matter in terms of Protestant and Catholic (May) or, even more generally, in terms of humility and pride (July). "Algrind," a more or less obvious reference to low-church activist and ousted Archbishop Edmund Grindal, is curiously glossed as "the name of a shepheard" (83 n. 75) with deafening silence. Grindal's suspension from the Archbishopric, which Thomalin allegorizes in the July eclogue, is read as an allusion to the storied demise of Aeschylus, who died when an eagle dropped a turtle on his bald head, mistaking it for a stone (105 n. 213).

Precedent thus obscures topicality in the hands of the critical pedant. The predictability of his misreading, here as in Marston, is precisely what makes him effective as political screen and metacritical foil. Given the events of the years and months leading up to

the publication of the *Calender* – the Admonition Controversy, Grindal's suspension, John Stubbs' publication of *A Gaping Gulf* and subsequent loss of his hand, the Queen's Proclamation against personal attacks upon Alençon – only a self-wise-seeming schoolmaster with his head in the clouds could overlook the topical overtones of Spenser's poem. And this is precisely the point, for it is those readily recognizable features of the pedant which the reader so often finds exhibited by E. K. – volubility, obsession with precedent, learning at the expense of urbanity or common sense – that make him coherent as a negative example. In a cunning metacritical maneuver, the poet is shielded from potentially disastrous political application and the savvy reader is directed to practical poetic ends by a dependably undependable critic who reveals meaning by showing us where not to look for it. At the same time, the shadow cast by his elaborate inutility gives shape to a new idea of the critic. The irrelevance of the things that E. K. knows, which at times seems amplified to the point of satire, and the tantalizing relevance of the things he doesn't know indicate, or perhaps even provoke, a need for a critic with different priorities. His commentary works like the old trick book case that recedes into the wall to reveal a secret passage. While the critical pedant peruses the dusty volumes of his decoy library, a conduit between poetry and the world of business is opened up to modern poets, readers, and critics.

V. The Case of Pedantius

The topicality of so many of the works examined above suggests an attempt by their authors to draw together as closely as possible the golden and brazen worlds. As we have seen, this context of topicality provided an ideal atmosphere in which to satirize the figure of the pedant, who, in his dogged resistance to relevance and novelty, served in various forms as a constitutive other for modern poets and critics anxious to establish the practical utility of their respective crafts. The success of such efforts might be gauged by the number of

critics who, over the last century or so, have posited direct connections between, for instance, the golden world's Espilus and the brazen world's Leicester, the golden world's E. K. and the brazen world's Edward Kirke. One of the most curious outcomes of the consolidation of a heterogeneous body of grammarians, private tutors, and schoolmasters into a coherent metacritical device was the idea that the pedant was not a device but a reality. No critic suffered more for that idea than Gabriel Harvey.

Although we come to Harvey at the end of this chapter, he has been with us all along. Critics have seen shades of him in Holofernes,⁴¹ in Luxurioso of the *Parnassus Plays*,⁴² and even in Marston's rather broadly drawn critical pedant.⁴³ Over the course of their paper war, Nashe would prepare a feast of satirical portraits of Harvey, culminating in the savagely parodic mock-biography, *Have with you to Saffron-Walden* (1596). Before any of these popular portraits, however, Nashe⁴⁴ tells us that Harvey had been caricatured on the university stage as *Pedantius* (1580/1⁴⁵), the title character of a Latin comedy written by Edward Forsett with the support of Anthony Wingfield, Harvey's ultimately successful rival for the post of Public Orator at Cambridge.⁴⁶ Regardless of whether it was specifically modeled after Harvey, applied to him after the fact, or merely ornamented with Harvey's mannerisms at the recommendation of Wingfield,⁴⁷ the role effectively forges a connection between the golden

⁴¹ See, for instance, Yates, pp. 80-2.

⁴² See Leishman's introduction, pp. 79-80, and Schrickx, pp. 225-31.

⁴³ See Schrickx, pp. 231-4.

⁴⁴ See Nashe, *Works*, 1.303 and 3.80.

⁴⁵ I follow Stern in dating the first performance of *Pedantius* in February of 1580/1. The play was not printed, however, until 1631, the year of Harvey's death. See Stern, pp. 54, 134.

⁴⁶ See Stern, pp. 53-4, and Moore Smith, ed., pp. xi-xx.

⁴⁷ Moore Smith describes the caricature as such an "after-thought" (xxvii).

and brazen worlds and between the pedant of the English stage and the pedant of England, all on the back of Gabriel Harvey. Moreover, here as in Aretino, Sidney, and Shakespeare, we find the relationship between learning and the world of business thematized and the pedant employed as a constitutive other for modern English pragmatism.

Once again, the context of love and marriage stands for the world of business to which the pedant stands opposed. Once again, the pedant finds himself dogged by attendant satirists of inferior social rank, students and slaves – a trope made iconic in the illustration featured in the 1631 edition of the play, which shows Pedantius holding forth (declaiming “As in praesenti,” a mnemonic from Lilly’s grammar and a catchall for grammar school) as his students stand sniggering behind him (fig. 1). And once again the pedant fails and is dismissed. Pedantius exhibits all the telltale signs of pedantry: a macaronic tongue, an obsession with precedent, and an investment in book learning at the expense of common sense or urbanity. These similarities, however, do not detract from the play’s innovations and, relatively speaking, the originality of Pedantius. Forsett’s pedant demonstrates a degree of social ambition that makes him unique among pedants. As G. C. Moore Smith observes in the introduction to his edition of the play, “In [Pedantius] we find satirized not only the ordinary schoolmaster of comedy with his classical « tags » and etymologies, not only the Nizolian humanist whose God is Cicero – but at the same time the scholar who has read Castiglione’s *Il Cortegiano* and would fain be a courtier and a man of affairs, though in his combination of qualities he only makes himself more than ever ridiculous” (xxxix). In addition to his social ambition, Pedantius is more directly involved in his play’s context of love and marriage than either Aretino’s Pedante or Shakespeare’s Holofernes. For this is the story of the pedant in love.

Pedantius, who has fallen for the slave Lydia, likens himself to Aristotle, who, dizzy with lust over Phyllis, permitted her to ride him like a horse (1.3.544-5; fig. 2). The comparison is apt, for Forsett seeks above all in this play to bring the learned low through the humiliation of Pedantius. His finds the means of this humiliation in Crobolus, a slave and fellow suitor to Lydia who aims to teach both Pedantius and his scholastic philosopher counterpart Dromodotus a lesson from the book of experience: “Today I shall teach them both the true value of knowledge with my expert trickery [Quos ego ambos hodie dolis doctis meis docebo quanti sit sapere]” (1.2.182-3).⁴⁸ Crobolus easily manipulates Pedantius by exploiting his own ambition, pride, and naiveté. He extorts his rent money out of the pedant by convincing him that he has been called to court to serve as royal tutor. Then, in league with Lydia, he extorts the money he needs to purchase Lydia’s freedom by convincing Pedantius that once freed, Lydia will be his forever. Finally, Crobolus completes his con by convincing Pedantius that Lydia has suddenly died. Pedantius’s response, before departing for faraway lands in accordance with Lydia’s dying wishes, is pure pedant: he will erect a tomb in her honor as Alexander did for his horse, Bucephalus, and write a tragedy on their star-crossed love entitled *Lachrymas Musarum* (5.6.2854-61). Outwitted by satirist slaves and rebuffed by love, marriage, and the world of practical affairs they represent, the pedant fails and is dismissed.

Supporting Nashe’s application, Moore Smith attests to “unmistakable references” to Harvey’s life and character in *Pedantius*. Harvey had published his own *Lachrymas Musarum* in *Smithus; vel Musarum Lachrymae* (1578), a volume of elegiac verses on the death of his trusted friend, advisor, and advocate Sir Thomas Smith (Moore Smith xxxv). Distinctive

⁴⁸ All citations of *Pedantius* refer to the Moore Smith edition, which marks scenes and acts but numbers the lines of the play consecutively. I have, however, also benefitted from Dana F. Sutton’s online edition of the play, which features an excellent translation and is available at the University of Birmingham’s Philological Museum (<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/>).

Latin phrases from this work as well as *Rhetor* (1577), a printed edition of Harvey's opening university orations of 1574 and 1575,⁴⁹ reappear in *Pedantius* (Moore Smith xxxv). Frederick Boas supports the match by pointing to the ambition Harvey had shown in his performance in disputation before the Queen at Audley End in 1578 and in his commemoration of the event in a collection of Latin verses entitled *Gratulationes Valdinenses* (1578), the four books of which were respectively dedicated to Elizabeth, Leicester, Burghley, and Oxford, Hatton, and Sidney (152; Stern 40). One of the poems in this collection, *De vultu Itali*, had played upon the Queen's observation at Audley End that Harvey had the face of an Italian (Stern 42). Boas perceives a reference to the title alongside a reference to Harvey's *Speculum Tuscanismi*, a satire of Italianate affectation (and possibly the Earl of Oxford, Sidney's great enemy at court), in *Pedantius*'s proleptic vision of himself at court: "Then I shall bear myself so exquisitely that everyone will say he sees the very mirror of Tuscanism in this Italian face [Denique ita graphice me geram, ut ipsissimum *speculum Tuscanismi* se videre quisque dicat in hoc *vultu Itali*]" (3.5.1468-70). Virginia Stern, Harvey's most recent biographer, considers the likeness unmistakable (69).

Even without *Pedantius*, however, Harvey's biography would, to a certain extent, invite the comparison. The world of business was surely just as brutal to Harvey as it was to any stage pedant. His ambitions were consistently disappointed by enemies at the universities and a seeming lack of interest at court. Thomas Neville, a Pembroke Fellow and Harvey's senior by just a few years, attempted to block Harvey from receiving his MA on grounds that Harvey consistently alienated himself from the company of his peers and espoused heterodox philosophical views (Stern 19-21). Harvey seemed always to have his nose in a book – and the wrong book – when the other Fellows were socializing (Stern 23).

⁴⁹ See Stern, p. 28.

Andrew Perne, the Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge, would later emerge as an even more vicious enemy, successfully blocking Harvey's appointment to the University Oratorship in 1579 and his appointment as Master of Trinity Hall in 1585 (Stern 39, 53, 77). The publication of Harvey's correspondence with Spenser in 1580, and especially that of the mock-Aristotelian "Earthquake Letter," was rightly taken as an affront to the dignity of scholarship at Cambridge (Stern 54, 58). Meanwhile, those prospective patrons and advocates at court whose interest the volume may have been designed to attract failed to take notice. Harvey would later acknowledge the blunder in his *Four Letters* (1592, 59). His appointment as secretary under Leicester was likely brief and, as Stern persuasively conjectures, may have inspired his sense that "Common Learning, & the name of *a good schollar* was never so much contemned, and *abjected of princes*, pragmatics, & common Gallants, as nowadays" (qtd. in Stern 46).

In his flying with Greene and Nashe, that brief and bold digression from the main course of his life for which he is now remembered, he fell, as Pedantius had, by his own pride. Placing too much stock in his learning and reputation – yet another mark of the pedant – and too little in the wit of his opponents, he entered into a fight he could not win. Nashe saw to it once and for all that Pedantius became the reality, a fact to which Alexander Grosart, Harvey's editor, testifies: "Take him all-in-all, GABRIEL HARVEY must abide a monumental example of how little "much learning" (granting that) does for CHARACTER; how possible it is to be a Scholar, and at the same time a Blockhead – mastered by, not mastering his acquisitions" (xlix).

In his correspondence with Spenser, published in *Three Proper and Wittie, Familiar Letters* (1580) and *Two Other Very Commendable Letters* (1580), we frequently encounter the Harvey of Grosart's description, the Harvey of *Pedantius*. In style, he is overwrought and

consistently macaronic and gratuitously allusive. If at times these features of his prose carry a hint of irony, as when he thanks Spenser for his “long, large, lauish, Luxurious, Laxatiue, Letters withall” (1.18), they nevertheless confirm the presence of an affectation that, in whatever spirit it is undertaken, may have compromised Harvey’s reputation among less friendly readers. In warning Spenser against the dangers of love and amatory verse, he sounds less like Marston set loose upon the poetic fads of the day than like a crabbed schoolmaster inveighing against “one of the predominant humors that raigne in our common youths” (1.25). “Credit me,” he warns his pupil, wagging his finger, “I will never leave baiting at you, till I have rid you quite of this yonkerly and womanly humor” (1.26).

Harvey’s detailed account of his tutoring of his younger brother John, whom he directs in translating Ovid and Petrarch, and in paraphrasing *The Shepheardes Calender*, continues this theme. So too does his criticism of Spenser’s English hexameters. While he claims to “honor” the *areopagus*, he cannot resist nitpicking his friend:

I finde not your warrant so sufficiently good, and substantiall in Lawe, that it can persuade me, they are all, so precisely perfect for the Feete, as your selfe ouer-partially weene, and over-confidently auouche: especiall the thirde, which hath a foote more than a Lowce ... and the sixte, which is also in the same Predicament, vnlesse happily one of the feete be sawed off wyth a payre of Synopes: and then shoulde the Orthographie haue testified so muche: and in steade of *Heavenli Virginals*, you should haue written, *Heaunli Virgnals*: & *Virgnals* again in the ninth, & should haue made a Curtoll of *Immerito* in the laste Then me thinketh, you haue in my fancie somewhat too many Spondees beside....

(1.21-3)

Overall, Harvey concedes, these mistakes are forgivable. Spenser’s real fault lay in claiming for his verses a precision which they lack – or perhaps in following the potentially faulty rules of Drant (1.23). Harvey dismisses the matter with a “Stoicall exclamation: Fie on childish affection, in the discoursing, and deciding of schoole matters” (1.24). For all of his downplaying during and after the fact, the pleasure Harvey takes in assuming the role of the

critical pedant is unmistakable. That pleasure would appear to stem as much from his sense of his own expertise (he will later claim to have invented the English hexameter) as from the experience of showcasing it for an audience, much as he had for the Queen at Audley End in 1578.

Harvey often invokes precedent, judging, for instance, Spenser's *Nine Muses* favorably for having come "neerer" to Ariosto's comedies than his "*Elvish Queene*" has to *Orlando Furioso* (1.95). In imitating the Italians, Harvey observes, Spenser imitates imitators; a critical undertow leads us helplessly back to Aristophanes and Menander, Plautus and Terence (1.95). And surely it is his conservatism, and that opposition to novelty that will wax full in serendipitous opposition to the greenness of Greene (his pun) and the "novels" of Nashe, that leads him to prefer Spenser's efforts in neoclassical comedy to his efforts in romance, which Cinthio had celebrated as the form of Italian modernity. Like Sidney's spite for "mongrel tragicomedy," it is a critical solecism difficult to countenance in hindsight. "I wil not stand greatly with you in your owne matters," Harvey claims with transparent ingenuousness; but to prefer the *Faerie Queene* to the *Nine Muses* would be to let "*Hobgoblin* runne away with the Garland from *Apollo*" (1.95).

We don't have to look hard for the pedant in Harvey. Yet there is more to him than there is to Pedantius, and a closer look at his printed English works reveals a critic caught between his own pedantic predilections and those political and social ambitions that make him receptive to Philocosmus's injunction to "be new with mens affections that are new." In Harvey we have the most acute case of the metacritical dilemma under review in this chapter, that of the would-be pedant attempting mitotically to split with an aspect of himself in an effort to plot out new critical ground. Even Harvey, Cambridge's Pedantius and

London's Gorboduck Huddleduddle, sets up the pedant to knock him down in the name of pragmatism.

Unlike Aretino's Pedante, who is too busy admiring the sound of his own voice to notice the crackling wicks tied to his robes, Harvey pays attention to his surroundings, and what he sees is new. At Cambridge, as he reports to Spenser, he has seen his students close their volumes of Cicero and Aristotle in favor of Machiavelli and Castiglione (1.69). Old gives way to new, "all inquisitive after Newes, newe Bookes, newe Fashions, newe Lawes, newe Officers, and some after newe Elements, and some after newe Heauens, and Helles to" (1.70). Those words that will later ring in the ears of the young John Donne – "Take you a course, get you a place" – are in 1580 already ringing in the ears of many a Cantabrigian. The new news of the new world of business has reached the academy, and Harvey diagnoses the outcome:

[S]chollars in ower age are rather nowe Aristippi then Diogenes: and rather active then contemplative philosophers: covetinge above alle thinges under heaven to appeare somewhat more then schollars if themselves wiste howe; and of all thinges in the worlde most detestinge that spitefull malicious proverbe, of greatist Clarkes, and not wisest men.

(1.136-7)

The greatest clerks be not the wisest men – Harvey's own disdain for the proverb prevents him from writing it out in full. Philosophers turn from contemplation to action, and scholars desperately pursue relevance. The *Organon* of Aristotle goes the way of Duns Scotus and is replaced by modern volumes of political philosophy (1.137-8). Loath to be left behind in the exodus, Harvey professes to Spenser to pursue only "those studies and practizes, that carrie as they saye, meate in their mouth, hauing euermore their eye vpon the Title *De pane lucrando*, and their hand vpon their halfpenny" (1.92).

Nevertheless, he maintains his faith in the ability of the dedicated and savvy scholar to direct reading and learning to profitable ends. Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton have revealed through a study of Harvey's marginalia, focusing in particular on his annotations of Livy, that he envisioned himself as a "facilitator" between the wisdom contained in ancient texts and modern political action. Whether reading with Thomas Smith, with Philip Sidney, or on his own, Harvey understood reading "not simply ... as active, but ... as [a] trigger for action" (40). Yet whether poetry or literary criticism can be incorporated under the heading of *De pane lucrando* remains to be seen, for Harvey continually vacillates on the point.

Trading poems and critical observations with Spenser in their letters, he appears to recognize the futility of literary pursuits:

God helpe vs, you and I are wisely employed, (are we not?) when our Pen and Inke, and Time and Wit, and all runneth away in this goodly yonkerly veine: as if the world had nothing else for vs to do: or we were borne to be the only *Nonproficients* and *Nililagents* of the world. *Cuiusmodi tu nugis, atq̄ naenijs, nisi una mecum (qui solemni quodam iureiurando, atq̄ voto obstrignor, relicto isto amoris Poculo, iuris Poculum primo quoq̄ tempore exhaurire) iam tandem aliquando valedicas, (quod tamen, unum tibi credo τῶν ἀδυνάτων videbitur)* [Do, I beg you, except with me (and I am bound by a solemn oath and vow to give up the cup of love and at the first opportunity to drain the cup of law) – do, I repeat, bid farewell to nonsense and trifling songs of this kind (which, nevertheless, I believe, will seem to you one of the things that cannot be done)]

(1.99)⁵⁰

Harvey's rhetorical prowess comes through brilliantly in this open letter, most of all in the way that he nullifies the very real possibility that the world has nothing else for him to do by rendering it in a conditional phrase in support of his plea that Spenser swear off such *nugae* as amatory verse.⁵¹ The modern scholar shrewdly prefers the cup of law to the cup of love.

⁵⁰ Tr. Gordon J. Laing, qtd. in Carpenter, p. 58.

⁵¹ Stern notes that Harvey consistently reminds himself in his marginalia not to waste time with writing (128). For Jessica Wolfe, such marginalia register an acknowledged "inconsistency between

After receiving his Doctor of Civil and Canon Law from Oxford in 1586, Harvey himself may have moved to London to pursue a career in the Court of Arches (Stern 80-1). Clearly, Harvey takes seriously the idea that in the eyes of England, to write amatory verse is to accomplish or perform nothing, to be a *nonproficient* or *nihilagent*. Yet his “*nisi una mecum*” is belied by the publication of the letter that contains it, and poetic and critical pursuits remain in play, if only as a means to more suitable employment.

Elsewhere, in a private letter to Spenser, Harvey playfully chastises his friend for having secretly published some of Harvey’s own verses. Such a gesture, Harvey imagines, will only bring him displeasure (1.125). Here, as he explains why, we find him writing with characteristic irony:

What thoughe Italy, Spayne and Fraunce ravissed with a certayne glorious and ambitious desier ... to sett oute and advaunce ther owne languages above the very Greake and Lattin, if it were possible, and standinge altogether uppon termes of honour and exquisite formes of speaches, karriinge a certayne brave, magnificent grace and maiestye with them, do so highly and honorably esteeme of their countrie poets reposing on greate parte of their sovraine glory and reputation abroad in the world in the famous writings of the nobblist wittes? What though you and a thousand such nurrish a stronge imagination amongst yourselves that Alexander, Scipio, Caesar, and most of ower honorablist and worthiest captaynes had never bene that they were but for pore blinde Homer? What thoughe it hath universally bene the practisse of the flourishigist States and most politique commonwelthes from whence we borrowe our substantiallist and most materiall praeceptes and examples of wise and considerate governement, to make [the] very most of ther vulgare tungen, and together with their seigniories and dominions by all meanes possible to amplifie and enlarge them, devising all ordinarye and extraordinarye helpes, both for the polissinge and refininge them at home, and alsoe for the spreddinge and dispersinge of them abroad? ... What a goddes name passe we what was dun in ruinous Athens or decayid Roome a thousand or twoe thousande yeares agoe? Doist thou not oversensibely perceiue that the markett goith far otherwise in Inglande wherein nothinge is reputid so comtemptible, and so basely and vilely accountid of as whatsoever is taken for Englishe, whether it be handsum fasshions in apparrell, or

[Harvey’s] obsession with practice and his enthusiasm for reading and writing” (143), an inconsistency he attempted to resolve, in Wolfe’s account, through the cultivation of *polymechany*, “an [amalgam] of virtues including political prudence, grace, pragmatism, and techincal skill” (16). See Wolfe, pp. 125-60.

seemely and honorable in behaviour, or choise wordes and phrases in speache or anye notable thinge else in effecte that savorith of our owne cuntrye, and is not ether merely or mixtely outlandishe? Is it not cleerer than the sonne at noonedayes that oure most excellent Ingish treatises, were they never so eloquentlye contrivid in prose, or curiously devised in meeter, have ever to this daye, and shall ever hereafter, be sibb to arithmetericians, or marchantes counters, which nowe and then stande for hundreds and thousand, by and bye for odd halfpens for fa[r]thinges and otherwhile for very nihils?

(1.122-4)

Through the irony of this series of questions, Harvey splits himself, like Daniel, into Musophilus and Philocosmus. If the arguments of the former are reflected in the questions themselves – the admirable precedents of the early Renaissance and the classical world, the service of poetry to the glory of nations, the service of poetry to military and other virtues, and even the role of eloquence in nation-building and imperial expansion – the form of those questions reflect the pragmatic rebuttals of the latter. What value do precedents have in the new English market? Harvey tellingly calculates the answer with merchants' counters and comes up with nothing.

Like the sharpest critics of his age, Harvey feels compelled to reconcile the tastes of what he calls the English "market" with those virtues of learning and poetry of which his education had so thoroughly convinced him. Indeed, it is precisely these opposed forces, prefigured in the Gosson-Sidney debate, that create a need for modern criticism and precisely this effort that makes Harvey a modern critic. Yet it also makes him an inconsistent one. The difficulty of his attempt to plot a middle flight between the kind of supermundane pedantry that is to be left behind with Scotus and the utter dismissal of the practical utility of poetry at the hands of the English market comes through in his correspondence with Spenser. He dangerously pitches his flight upwards toward English hexameters, as if oblivious to the call of custom sounded by Daniel's *Defence of Ryme*. Yet he

rights himself by wagering that the examples of Sidney and Dyer will be more useful in establishing quantitative verse than the precepts of Ascham (1.75). Invoking Horace, he nitpicks the irregularity of Spenser's quantification of English words. Yet he does so in an attempt to align spoken and written English and to replace Spenser's "*Carpēter*" with "carpenter" as "God and his Englishe people haue made him" (1.100). At times, he attempts to topple the pedant from below, preferring a "homely and ridiculous" style to the "over curious and statelie" style of the would-be orator (1.119). Elsewhere he attempts to lose him in the sun and sounds less like Quintilian than Longinus, praising a certain "singular extraordinarie veine and inuention, which I euer fancied moste ... rare, quaint, and odde in euery pointe, and as a man woulde saye, a degree or two at the leaste, aboue the reache, and compasse of a common Schollers capacitie" (1.93-4).

In January of 1582/3, Richard Harvey, younger brother to Gabriel, published a pamphlet entitled *An Astrological Discourse upon the Conjunction of Saturne & Jupiter*, which made bold predictions regarding the outcome of this astrological phenomenon, set to occur in the coming April. The work made him a laughing stock, and he was mocked in print and on stage.⁵² In 1590, having regained his courage, he went to press once again, this time in an attempt to intercede in the Marprelate controversy through his *Lamb of God*. It was thus his misfortune publicly to take issue with the anti-Martinists and specifically to call out the young Thomas Nashe for daring to criticize the writings of his elders in his preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (1589): "let not *Martin*, or *Nash*, or any such famous obscure man, or any other piperly makeplay or makebate, presume ouermuch of my patience as of simplicitie, but of choice" (a3^r). These were the opening salvos of what would prove to be the greatest literary debate of Elizabethan England, a debate that would receive specific

⁵² See Stern, p. 70.

mention in the Bishops' Ban of 1599, which ordered that "all Nasshes and Doctor Harvyes bookes be taken wheresoever they maye be found and that none of theire bookes bee ever printed hereafter."⁵³

Greene returned fire in 1592 in his *Quip for an upstart Courtier* by satirizing all three of the Harvey boys as well as their father, John Harvey, a yeoman farmer and master rope-maker. There Greene continued to build on Harvey's growing reputation as a pompous pedant by mocking him as the inventor of the English hexameter (E3^v). Nashe meanwhile responded directly to Richard in *Pierce Penniless* (1592): "I haue reade ouer thy Sheepish discourse of the Lambe of GOD and his enemies, and entreated my patience to be good to thee whilst I read: but for all that I could doe with my selfe ... I could not refraine, but bequeath it to the Priuie, leafe by leafe as I read it, it was so vgly, dorbellicall, and lumpish" (1.198). Gabriel came to the defense of his family that same year with his *Foure Letters*, which Nashe satirically dissected in his *Strange Newes* toward the end of the year. In the spring of 1593, Harvey took on Nashe and satire at length in *Pierces Supererogation*, a work presented as a "preparative to certain larger Discourses, intituled NASHES S[t]. FAME." When Nashe offered a truce in the preface to *Christ's Tears over Jerusalem* (1593), like Giannicco attempting to coax the rage of the Pedante, Harvey balked and further attacked his untrustworthy rival in *A New Letter of Notable Contents* (1593). Nashe effectively ended the debate in 1596, and left a lasting stain on Harvey's reputation, with *Have with you to Saffron-Walden, or, Gabriel Harveys Hunt is up*.

The place of this debate in the present study becomes clear if we regard it as a debate between two critics over the manner of criticism. Harvey and Nashe are vastly different critics, and, as Virginia Stern explains, the gap between their methodologies goes a long way

⁵³ E. Arber, ed., *Transcripts of the Stationers' Registers* (1913), 3.677, qtd. in Stern, p. 129.

toward explaining the outcome of their debate: “One understands why Nashe who chose to rail in a needling but jocular, only half-earnest manner with multifarious thrusts of skilful swordplay was easily the winner in this war of words with a methodical man who persisted in painstakingly rebutting the substance of every attack Nashe had a gift for seeing and depicting the ridiculous in human behaviour. His mixture of amusing fact and colourful fiction proved readily saleable to a public only too glad to deflate a Doctor of Law so much preoccupied with abstruse and erudite matters” (109).

The very terms of Stern’s comparison – “jocular” versus “methodical,” “amusing” versus “abstruse” – place Harvey and Nashe within a well-established framework of opposition that doubtless contextualized the debate for its original audience as well. Sketched in the broadest possible strokes, the debate between Harvey and Nashe would appear to play out the archetypal debate between the pedant and the satirist. Setting aside the unfortunate outcome for both parties involved, the debate reinforces the idea developed in this and the next chapter of a symbiotic if fraught relationship between these two figures. Each defines himself through the other and thus grants definition to the other in equal measure to the definition he borrows. Yet in the case of Harvey and Nashe, as in the case of the Pedante and Giannicco, as party lines are drawn and the confines of established types become restrictive, each begins to rebel against the idea of the critic in which he finds himself claustrophobically contained. The putative pedant bucks against pedantry, and the putative satirist against satire, both striving for an undefined critical middle-ground where criticism seeks above all the development of an English literary tradition along the most practical of guidelines.

At the outset of the debate, in *Four Letters*, Harvey seems once again to play directly into the role prepared for him. He pompously accepts the title of “Inuentour of the English

Hexameter” (1.182) that Greene had fobbed off on him with tongue in cheek. He diminishes the threat posed by his opponents, and blocks their claim to novelty, by pedantically reducing them to the sum of their precedents. “[F]ather *Elderton*,” the balladeer who may have taken a swing at Richard Harvey, “and his sonne *Greene*” are nothing more than Zoilus *redux*, “and in attempting to pull downe, or disgrace other without order, must needes finally ouerthrow themselves without relief” (1.164). Greene is “a desperate Lucianist: an abhominable Aretinist” (1.190), and Nashe’s style betrays the “tenour of Tarletons president” (1.194). This tactic of historicizing provides the pedant with his best defense against what Harvey calls “monstrous newfanglednesse” (1.191), the newness or greenness which Harvey conveniently aligns with the name of his opponent and which offends both tradition and decorum. Harvey often stands but a pace or two away from Rombus in his assessment of modern English tastes. We can hear the “*O Tempori, O Moribus!*” of Sidney’s pedant in these lines on the pamphleteers: “Howe vnlike *Tullies* sweete Offices: or *Isocrates* pithy instructio[n]s: or *Plutarches* holesome Morralls: or the delicate Dialogues of *Xenophon*” – the list goes on (1.191). In mocking Nashe’s learning (his mind is penniless, not his purse [1.195]) and in urging all writers of his ilk to trade out “the fantastical mould of *Aretine* or *Rabelays*” for that of “*Orpheus*, *Homer*, *Pindarus*, & the excellentest wittes of Greece” or the Hebrew poets, he misunderstands the motives and methods of the pamphleteers and invites the doom of the pedant on his own head.

Yet in the same work, we also find the practical-minded scholar of the Spenser letters. This iteration of Harvey insists upon the practical utility of his own and others’ written works (1.202) and advises his opponents and other readers to consider “the olde Romane Discipline and the newe Spanish industry” (1.192). Recognizing that more pernicious threats than a libelous ballad lie on the horizon of what he calls “an Age of

Pollicy, and ... a world of Industry” (1.222), Harvey proclaims “one perfect Mechanician worth ten vnperfect Philosophers” (1.230) and takes arms against his unwelcome reputation as pedant: “Whatsoever occasion causeth me to be mistaken, as ouer-much addicted to Theory, without respect of action ... I neuer made account of any study, meditation, conference, or Exercise, that importeth not effectual vse, & that aymeth not altogether at action: as the singular marke, whereat euery Arte, & euery vertue is to leuell” (1.228). In the spirit of such pragmatism, and over against the theory-bound pedant and the vain and equally impractical raillery of Greene and Nashe, Harvey delineates the shape of a practical-minded criticism predicated upon exercise, charity, and discretion.

The chief practical end of the critic that Harvey intends, in his better moments, to become is the fostering of a tradition of English poetry. That end casts his pedantic tendencies in a new light. For when he foregoes to lament with Cicero and Rombus, we find him recommending the Greeks and the Hebrew poets to everyone from Spenser to Nashe “and the rest, whome I affectionately thancke for their studious endeauiours, commendably employed in enriching, & polishing their natiue tongue, neuer so furnished, or embellished, as of / late” (1.218-9). The practical end of poetic progress in England alleviates the threat of novelty for Harvey and brings out a new modest and charitable critic. He urges charity in Greene and Elderton, for “neither the unhappiest creature vtterly deuoid of all graces: (I praise something in Elderton, and Greene:) nor the excellentest personage thoroughly accomplished with all perfections: (ah, that *Sir Humfrey Gilbert* and *Sir Philip Sidney*, hadd bene as cautelous, as adventurous :)” (1.210-1). Offering them his hand (1.216), Harvey makes a critical promise to “bestow more complements of rare amplifications” upon any writer who employs eloquence with “amounting vsance” than he ever bestowed upon those twin luminaries, Sidney and Spenser (1.217-8). He envisions a small-scale poetic economy in

which the charitable critic serves to encourage and instruct the poet and to spread his fame in accordance with, or even slightly beyond, his deserts.

The single most important feature of the Harvein critic is discretion, a term which Harvey uses with striking regularity in the debate texts. He employs it, as is so often the case with Harvey, with the Latin root in mind and the idea of separation, judgment, and discrimination contained in *discretio*. In the *Foure Letters*, it often finds negative expression through Harvey's exasperation at Greene, Nashe, and other "ouer-weening youthes" (1.199):

There is a certaine thing, called Modestie[,] if they could light vpon it: and by my younge Masters leaue, some pritty smacke [of] discretion would relish well.

(1.200)⁵⁴

Would Christ, they had more discretion in them, and lesse rancour against other, that neuer wished them the least euill, but still beseech GOD to encrease the best, and to pardon the worst in them.

(1.205)

Discretion, then, in Harvey's metacritical definition of the term, is that which these critics lack, namely, the ability to master the will to criticism and to distinguish, for instance, between those works, authors, and men who deserve rebuke, those who require gentle correction, and those who demand only encouragement. In light of Harvey's rather pitiless treatment of the recently deceased Robert Greene, we might say that critical discretion in the *Foure Letters* is a custom more honored in the breach than in the observance. Nevertheless, the theory begins to take shape there. The vile detractor, to whom Harvey, whether convincingly or no, opposes himself, runs the risk of reducing the whole world to a single, homogenous target for his poisonous wit. Discretion gives way to indulged affectation and the kind of singularity of judgment that Marston depicts with a squinting, disfiguring eye – indeed, the kind of singularity of which Harvey himself had been accused by his enemies at

⁵⁴ I have corrected this sentence as it appears in Grosart's edition with reference to the second printing of the 1592 edition of the *Foure Letters* (STC 12900.5, sig. E2r).

Pembroke (Stern 23). These qualities make “euery Martin Iunior, and Puny Pierce, a monarch in the kingdome of his owne humour” (1.233). The overtones of this political terminology are sounded quite deliberately.

Harvey envisions with a frisson what will become of true judgment and the commonwealth of England if English “buyers” (1.190) continue to endorse such “Nouels” as Greene and Nashe provide:

God helpe, when Ignorance, and want of Experience, vsurping the chayre of scrupulous, and rigorous Iudgement, will in a fantastick Imagination, or, percase / in a melancholy moode, presume father, by infinite degrees, then the learnedest men in a ciuill Commonwealth, or the sagest counsellours in a Princes Court.

(1.233)

As goes discretion, so goes the commonwealth.⁵⁵ The same principle that informs proper critical judgment – that is, a sense of significant and hierarchically structured distinctions between various works and authors – also informs the structure of English society and the monarchy of Elizabeth I. Later, in the more fervid *Pierces Supererogation*, Harvey will oppose Martinists and anti-Martinists alike from the basis of discretion. Both parties threaten degree, the former by attempting to rebuild the church upon a popular foundation and the latter with critical impudence. Similarly, the offense Harvey takes at Nashe’s impudence in the *Four Letters* has as much to do with Nashe’s social and intellectual standing in relation to Harvey as it does with the particular content of his writings. He reminds us that he was a

⁵⁵ David Hillman has written a fascinating study of the use of the word “discretion” through the lens of Bourdieu’s habitus, affording us a glimpse of its role in reconciling subjective and objective structures of thought in late sixteenth-century England. Though Harvey employs the term quite differently than Puttenham or Shakespeare, Hillman’s ideas on Puttenham’s use of the word to contain a multitude of difficult-to-articulate values is nevertheless enlightening in the case of Harvey. See David Hillman, “Puttenham, Shakespeare, and the Abuse of Rhetoric,” *SEL* 36.1 (Winter 1996), 73-90.

lecturer in philosophy at Cambridge when Nashe was “not so much as *idoneus auditor civilis scientiae*” (1.201-2).

It is collectively this swarm of critical, social, and political considerations that leads Harvey to assume the role of modern English critic. Like Gosson and Sidney, he presents himself in the *Four Letters* as having been forced into that role, obliged to write what he terms “mine owne enforced defence” (1.155). Although his own injured pride and a compelling sense of familial duty figure centrally in that enforcement, his consistent appeals to discretion and ominous declarations of the political implications of an unbridled press suggest that personal interests alone cannot account for his critical engagement. Harvey, like Gosson in his account of the players’ search, reveals an unfulfilled need created by the burgeoning literary market. If on the one hand he acknowledges that neither “Cesars might” nor any “Saints deuotion” can stop such mouths as those that rail in English pamphlets, he also insists that “They that cannot gouerne themselues, must bee ruled by other,” leaving that other unnamed but nonetheless clearly implied (1.166-7). His responsibilities as a critic are both personal and civic: “better an hundred Ouides were banished, then the state of Augustus endangered, or a soueraigne Empire infected” (1.192). Outweighing both of these categories, however, are his obligations to criticism itself.

Above all, Harvey steps up as a critic in the name of criticism and specifically in the name of a form of criticism he desires to see put into practice. We begin to see this idea delineated in the *Four Letters*, especially in Harvey’s invocation of discretion. In “Greenes Memorial,” the set of sonnets which concludes that text and features poems with such patently metacritical titles as “His admonition to Greenes Companions,” “The miserable end of wilful desperatenesse,” “The learned should louingly affect the learned,” and “His Desire, to honour excellent Perfections in the best,” Harvey continues to sketch out the details of

this proper method. He characterizes himself as one “That looues to looue, in spite of rankest Spite / And hates to hate, with Hart, or Tongue, or Pen” (1.239). As a critic, he confesses, “I cannot raile ... / For Charity I louingly imbrace” (1.239). He implores his critics to forego raillery and “canced peeuishnes” (1.242) and invites them instead to “implore / Of deepest Artists the profoundest lore,” that is, to engage in a criticism aimed at fostering an English poetic tradition. Here too, discretion figures prominently, if not in name, then in spirit:

I am not to instruct where I may learne:
But where I may persuasiuely exhort,
Nor ouer-dissolute, not ouer-sterne,
A curteous Honesty I would extort.

(1.240)

Proper criticism knows when to speak and when to listen. In terms of manner, it targets a middle ground between the dissolution of the pamphleteer and the stern rigidity of the pedant. Branching out from “discretion,” Harvey terms this method “curteous Honesty” and “exhorts” his readers to pursue it with eagerness. In the *New Letter*, Harvey’s subsequent entry in the debate, he will continue to promote this method, confident that “the Morning Starre of *Discretion*, and the Euening Starre of *Experience* haue a deepe insight in the merites of euery cause” (1.267-8).

Taking on Nashe directly and at length in *Pierces Supererogation*, Harvey continues to struggle between pedantry, anti-intellectual pragmatism, and raillery, and to pursue and promote critical discretion. He once again attempts to diminish the threat posed by Nashe, whose *Strange News* had savagely and directly attacked Harvey and confuted his *Four Letters*, by reducing him to the sum of his precedents (2.43, 2.234, 2.244) and proclaiming “no exercise more auncient, then Iambiques amongst Poetes; Inuectiues amongst Oratours; Confutations amongst Philosophers; Satyres amongst Carpers; Libels amongst factioners;

Pasquils amongst Malcontentes; and quarrells amongst all” (2.43). He pedantically inveighs against Nashe’s “Impudency” (e.g., 2.42, 89) and proudly extols his own literary achievements and his most esteemed admirers (2.83-4). Like Rombus, he laments the modern neglect of timeless models (2.53), the waning of eloquence (2.218), and the replacement of doctors with roisters (2.54). Like the Pedante or Pedantius, he appears to misunderstand the nature of his satirical opponents, charging Nashe with a failure to substantiate his claims (2.72-3) and rather ridiculously contending that “It is not the Affirmatiue, or Negatiue of the writer, but the trueth of the matter written, that carryeth meat in the mouth, and victory in the hande” (2.47). He opposes himself to novelty, mocking Nashe and other “Modernists” for their disdain for precedent (2.278).

Meanwhile, the notes of anti-pedantic pragmatism that had colored the *Four Letters* and the Spenser letters reach a new level of intensity here. As if turning the charge of pedantry back upon Nashe, he mocks his obscurity and “Inkhornish phrases” (2.275). Nashe’s prose is so affectedly obscure, Harvey declares, that it requires Ascham’s double translation before it can be understood (2.246). Harvey continues to champion practice or exercise over theory, both in terms of critical judgment and in terms of church policy. In the spliced-in rejoinder to John Lyly, “Advertisement for Pap-hatchet,” which had been written in 1589 (Stern 105), Harvey opposes the Martinists as naive theorists, whose theories, if they were put into practice, would in a year generate a thousand questions never before considered by them (2.208). Practice outweighs theory because it takes circumstances into consideration: “Howbeit none so fitt to reconcile contradictions, or to accord differences, as hee that distinguisheth Times, Places, Occasions, and other swaying Circumstances *Qui bene distinguit, bene docet*” (2.140).

Most notable of all, however, Harvey repeatedly invokes the new priorities of the present “actiue and industrious world” (2.34), “Age of Policy, World of Industry” (2.95), or “world of businesse” (3.319), and, as in the *Foure Letters*, often opts for a political context. “Phy vpon fooleries,” he proclaims; “there be honourable woorkes to doe; and notable workes to read” (2.103). Who pens a better pamphlet between Greene and Nashe? Why, Sir Roger Williams, of course, in his *Brief Discourse of War* (1590) (2.99). Proving himself the man of practice he so often praises, Harvey argues that although Nashe’s ribaldry might have been tolerable a decade or two earlier, now, in the new English world of business, what with the exploration of the west, the expansion of English trade, and the recent victory over Spain, “there is a busier pageant vpon the stage” (2.96). Read Drake, Raleigh, or Hakluyt, or simply consider the “Meanes of our assurance” against Spain, and you shall find “proffit to be our pleasure, prouision our security, labour our honour, warfare our welfare: who of reckoning, can spare anye lewde, or vaine tyme for corrupt pamphlets; or who of iudgment, will not cry? away with these paultringe fidle-fadles” (2.97-8). “The date of idle vanities is expired,” Harvey gloomily declares (1.95). England has become another Sparta, requires “Spartan Temperance, Spartan Frugality, Spartan exercise,” and “hath no wanton leasure for the Comedyes of Athens; nor anye bawdy howers for the songes of Priapus, or the rymes of Nashe” (1.95-6).

Yet here again, as in the *Foure Letters*, we find Harvey drawn to criticism not merely by pedantic predilections, pragmatic concerns, and personal ire, but also by a metacritical sensibility that opposes him to the affected singularity of the vile detractor. Nashe confutes Harvey out of sheer willfulness, as opposed to critical discretion (2.112). He is utterly singular in judgment (e.g., 2.51, 61, 119), has made an idol of his own style (2.280-1), and attacks any author who “tickle[s] not his wa[n]ton sense” (2.107). Harvey once again

indicates a need for critical authority stemming equally from political and purely critical interests. From the political perspective, he observes that “One Ouid was too-much for Roome; and one Greene too-much for London; but one Nashe more intolerable then both: not because his witt is anye thinge comparable, but because his will is more outragious” (2.94). “[D]eprauers of co[m]mon discipline” must not be tolerated in a “puissant kingdom” (2.94). Harvey envisions his criticism as a means to resolving this political dilemma: “My writing, is but a priuate note for the publique advertiseme[n]t of some fewe: whose youth asketh instruction, & whose frailtie needeth admonition” (2.109). The Harveian critic intercedes not merely between writer and reader but between the world of letters and the state.

From the critical perspective, Harvey continues to counsel discretion. Here he urges Nashe to have more discretion (2.16) and wishes that he had “seasoned his stile with the least spice of discretion” (2.235). And there he attacks Nashe for his “great store of little discretion” (2.65), his “penniworth of discretion” (2.75), or, figuratively, his habit of overeating at breakfast (2.89). Harvey thus also continues, in part, to define discretion negatively in terms of Nashe’s unbridled critical will. But he also provides us with a clear definition of this central critical principle:

Iudgement is the wisest reader of Bookes: and no Art of distinctions, so infallible, as grounded Discretion: which will soone discerne betweene White, and Black: and easely perceiue, what wanteth, what superaboundeth; what becommeth, what / misbecommeth; what in this, or that respect, deserueth commendation; what may reasonably, or probably be excused; what would be marked with an Asteriske, what noted with a blacke coale. As in mettals, so in stiles, he hath slender skill, that cannot descry copper from gold, tinne from siluer, iron from steele, the refuse from the rich veyne, the drosse from the pure substance for mine owne part I refuse not to vnderly the Verdict of any curteous, or equall censure, that can discerne betwixt chalke, and cheese.

(2.318)

If Lyly, Greene, and Nashe, both in themselves and in their treatment of Harvey, provide the initial impetus for Harvey's theorizing on proper critical practice, Harvey does not limit his expression of that practice to negative statements. We have here a clear picture of a criticism characterized not by raillery but by courtesy and founded not upon wild and wooly wit but upon a controlled capacity for precise and often subtle distinctions that Harvey terms *discretion*. Harvey's problem with Nashe's criticism and with the reputation for pedantic theorizing forced upon him is that both are one-note sambas: lacking discretion, they judge in haste and without an eye to practical utility. They make no distinction between asterisk and black coal and search too lightly for stuff of use.

Harvey enriches his portrait of the ideal critic throughout *Pierces Supererogation* both through direct theorizing and through the example of his own critical practice. He suggests that discretion produces modesty (2.81) and celebrates the ability of learned Catholics and Protestants to see past their religious differences to each other's intellectual merits: "Oh, that learning were euer married to such discretion" (2.172). Applying his observations on Lyly to Nashe, he argues that the Martinist controversy must be cured with "private discretion" and with the charity of Paul (2.175). Charity, in critical terms, consistently means for Harvey humility in manner and generosity in judgment: "I deem him wise, that maketh choice of the best; avoideth the worse; reapeth fruit by both; despiseth nothing, that is not to be abhorred; accepteth of anything, that may be tolerated" (2.292). Harvey thus describes the work of the critic in terms of alchemy: "play the Alchimist, in seeking pure and sweet balmes in the rankest poisons. A pithy, or filed sentence is to be embraced, whosoeuer is the Autor: and for the lest benefit receiued, a good minde will render dutifull thanks, euen to his greatest enemy" (2.293). He provides an example of charitable criticism by presenting an extended list of the most talented modern writers, to which he adds a charitable observation: "in an

hundred such vulgar writers, many things are commendable, diuers things notable, some things excellent” (2.290). His praise extends even to his enemies, both those in print and Andrew Perne, the chief obstacle of Harvey’s academic career: “I thanke Nash for something: Greene for more: Pap-hatchet for much more: Perne for most of all” (2.294). All the while, Harvey continues to pursue a middle way between over-affection for tradition and over-affection for novelty, between the supermundane concerns of the pedant and an excessive pragmatism that turns its back on literary art. Discretion determines his stance in both ecclesiastical and critical matters, and his incorporation of the “Advertisement” into this work invites the reader to see the correspondence between these two arenas of English culture: “It is neither the Excesse, nor the Defect, but the Meane, that edifyeth May Iudgement be whoodwinked with friuolous traditions: and cannot Phantasie be enueigled with newfangled conceits?” (2.135).

Gabriel Harvey is forced into the role of the modern critic and into a metacritical debate over the very idea of the modern critic both by personal circumstances and by social, political, and purely critical considerations that reveal to him, and through which he reveals to his reader, a need for critical authority. He shapes his idea of the critic by opposing it both to the manner of his enemies, chiefly Nashe, and to the manner of the pedant they had made of him. Yet we can measure the depth of his commitment to English letters by the fact that he does not stop at self-defense but presses on to develop an idea of the critic that transcends the circumstances of the Harvey-Nashe debate. Defining the critic becomes for Harvey a balancing act, a matter of reconciling tendencies which he had seen lead to dangerous excesses in himself and in his critical opponents. Even Spenser, who praised his “critique pen” in a poem of exceptional grace and charity among portraits of Harvey, presents his friend as a critic of absolutes, removed, “like a Looker-on / Of this worldes

Stage” (1.253), from the swaying circumstances of the world of business. This portrait, an unmistakable if charitable evocation of the pedant, provided Harvey with a metacritical point of departure. The raillery of Nashe, which ultimately put an end to his critical and literary careers, taught him how much is too much. Between the two, he sought to reconcile backwards-looking pedantry with forward-looking hope, charity, and discretion:

Few they are, that are qualified to surpass, or equall those singular Presidents [Orpheus, Homer, Virgil, Ariosto, Tasso]: but they few would be reteined with a golden fee, or interteined with siluer Curtesie. Some I know in *Cambridge*; some in *Oxford*; some in *London*; some *elsewhere*, died in the purest graine of *Art*, & *Exercise*; but a few in either, and not many in all: that vndoubtedly can do excellently well, exceedingly well. And were they thorowghly employed according to the possibility of their *Learning & Industry*, who can tell, what comparison this tongue might wage with most-floorishing La[n]guages of Europe: or what an inestimable crop of most noble and soueraine fruite, the hand of *Art*, and the spirite of *Emulation* might reape in a rich, and honorable field?

(1.265-6)

CHAPTER FOUR: THOMAS NASHE AND THE VILE DETRACTOR

I. The Polecat of Paul's

From the *Three Letters* (1580) to *A New Letter* (1593), the English works of Gabriel Harvey present us not so much with a coherent portrait of the critic as with the dramatization of a struggle between two opposed ideas of the critic, one given and the other given off.¹ Puzzled by the reputation for pedantry that had clung to him since his days as a fellow at Cambridge, a reputation often borne out by his works, Harvey actively resists it, defining himself as a critic in contradistinction to the pedant. Gradually, the silhouette of a charitable, forward-looking, socially-invested, and above all discreet critic emerges, even if Harvey fails to fulfill those qualities himself. The figure of the pedant, which, as a means of marginalizing English literary criticism, threatened to provide it in its infancy with the same tragic fate reserved for Harvey himself, becomes an asset as Harvey and other critics employ it as an apophatic expression of proper critical practice and an idea over against which to plot out critical progress in England.

This is, as it were, the story so far. It remains incomplete, however, in that it passes over the diminutive figure at the pedant's side, the Lady of May to Sidney's Rombus, the Giannicco to Aretino's Marescalco, the Nashe to Nashe's Harvey. The role of the attendant satirist in the invention of the critic must be accounted for. After all, Harvey spends just as much ink defining Nashe's critical identity, and opposing himself to it, as he does recuperating his own:

¹ On this distinction, which I borrow from Erving Goffman, see pp. 14 of the introduction.

Nash, Nash, Nash, (quoth a louer of truth, and honesty), vaine Nash, railing Nash, craking Nash, bibbing Nash, baggage Nash, swaddish Nash, rogish Nash, Nash the bellweather of the scribling flocke, the swish-swash of the presse, the bumm of Impude[n]cy, the shambles of beastlines, the poulkat of Pouls-churchyard, the shrichowle of London, the toade-stoole of the Realme, the scorning-stock of the world, & the horrible Co[n]futer of foure Letters.

(2.273)²

The vigor with which this litany of aspersions reduces Nashe from man to beast to fungus fails to redeem the bathos of its final entry, which for Harvey is last but certainly not least. Giving Nashe tit for tat, and parodically striking at the apostrophic heart of raillery, Harvey indulges here in some vituperative name-calling. Yet there is something to it, and Harvey's assessment of Nashe is not always so reactionary. More often, in fact, Nashe assumes in Harvey's writings the shape of a readily identifiable type, an object of universal rather than merely personal scorn, a figure variously identified by Harvey and his contemporaries as the "railer," the "backbiter," the "detractor," or sometimes just the "critic." The application of this type makes it possible for Harvey to fill out *Pierces Supererogation* (1593) with a previously penned invective directed against the John Lyly of *Papp with a Hatchet* (1589). So strong is the resemblance between these two writers, Harvey notes, "that I need but overrun an old censure of the one by way of new application to the other" (2.121). The same principle that allows Lyly to stand for Nashe, or Nashe for Lyly, also allows Harvey's quarrel with Nashe to inherit the structure of a more broad-based contemporary quarrel between productive modes of criticism or judgment and what was most often called "detraction." That larger quarrel, and its appropriation by the critics of early modern England, is the subject of this chapter.

Like the pedant, the type evoked by Harvey's portrait not just of Lyly and Nashe but also of Robert Greene possesses a set of defining features. Driven by what Harvey calls

² All citations of the works of Gabriel Harvey refer to the Grosart edition.

“vile ambition” (2.121), the detractor sucks fame from his victims like a vampire. Hungry for fame, or just plain hungry, Greene attempts to advance his reputation “by diffamation of other” (1.163). Likewise, Nashe seeks “the exaltation of his fame, by the depression of their credit, that are hable to extinguish the proudest glimze of his Lampe” (3.325). By implying the inherent superiority of the detractor’s victims, and indicating their ability, were they so inclined, to snuff out the proud glow of his little lamp, Harvey makes an even more subtle point about the dynamics of detraction. Detraction, he suggests, depends upon *distraction*. Detractors win the unmerited fame they so desperately crave by drawing the critical attention of their readers or auditors toward the object of their detraction and away from themselves. Sidney had made a similar point in the *Defence*, observing that

not only in these μισόμουσοι, poet-haters, but in all that kind of people who seek a praise by dispraising others, that they do prodigally spend a great many wandering words in quips and scoffs, carping and taunting at each thing which, by stirring the spleen, may stay the brain from a through-beholding of the worthiness of the subject. Those kind of objections, as they are full of a very idle easiness, since there is nothing of so sacred a majesty but that an itching tongue may rub itself upon it, so deserve they no other answer, but, instead of laughing at the jest, to laugh at the jester.

(*Misc. Prose* 99-100)

Sidney thus corroborates and goes further than Harvey by providing a physiological account of the process of distraction by which detraction operates. As the detractor carps and taunts indiscriminately, his spleen becomes hyperactive, inhibiting the critical capacity of his brain. Presumably, Sidney aside, detraction promotes a similar effect among its readers by a kind of contagion. According to this pathology, detraction is not a mode of judgment but an obstruction of it.

The indiscretion of the detractor – that is, his tendency to detract indiscriminately – is, for Sidney and Harvey alike, essential to the risibility and critical irrelevance of this figure.

Where Sidney notes generally that “there is nothing of so sacred a majesty but that an itching tongue may rub itself upon it,” Harvey makes the point particular, and more specific, with Nashe:

where any phrase, or word presumeth to approch within his swing, that was not before enrowled in the Common-places of his paper booke, it is presently meere Inkhornisme: albeit he might haue heard the same from a thousand mouthes of Iudgement, or read it in more then an hundred writings of estimation if he vnderstand, it is Dunsery: if he vnder/stand not, it is either Cabalisme in matter, or Inkhornisme in forme: whether he be ripe, or vnripe, all is raw, or rotten, that pleaseth not his Imperiall tast.

(2.273-4)

Indiscriminate, to be sure: the detractor will swing at anything and dismisses everything. Elsewhere, Harvey compares Nashe to Meridarpax, the murine hero of the *Batrachomyomachia*, who “neuer made such a hauock of the miserable frogges: as this Swash-pen would make of all English writers” (2.243). But Harvey here adds to the vice of indiscretion the antecedent vice of a singular and unregulated standard of judgment. As per Protagoras, the detractor is the measure of all things. He pursues his humorous tastes in spite of “a thousand mouthes of Iudgement,” condemning all that he reads in terms of his own narrow experience. With the political implications of Nashe’s “Imperiall tast,” Harvey conjures up the nightmare vision of the early modern tyrant, who ignores his advisors (“thousand mouthes,” “hundred writings”) and rules by personal will and appetite.

Beyond being vilely ambitious, indiscriminately condemnatory, and perversely singular in judgment, the detractor is lazy, cowardly, and parasitic. For Harvey, these qualities are all wrapped up in the limited mode in which Nashe operates, “railing, railing, railing: bragging, bragging, bragging – and nothing else” (2.117). “[W]ho cannot return home a quip[?]” (1.185). “[W]hat mad Bedlam cannot raile?” (2.115). Detraction requires no skill and involves no personal risk. Rather than meet Harvey on the field of logical

debate, and invest the time and energy required to work through the five-fold process of rhetorical preparation and performance, Nashe parasitically turns Harvey's own material against him in *Strange News* (1593), "his only Art ... to mangle my sentences, hack my arguments, chopp and change my phrases, wrinch my wordes, and hale euery sillable most extremely; euen to the disjoynting, and maiming of my whole meaning" (2.115). All bluster, a "huge Behemoth of Conceit ... and the hideous Leuiathan of Vainglorie," Nashe proves in execution "to be the sprat of a pickle herring ... a shrimpe in Witt, a periwinkle in Art, a dandiprat in Industrie, a dodkin in Valu" (2.115). "[H]e is no boddy, but a fewe pilfred Similes; a little Pedanticall Latin" (2.129) – a hodgepodge of regurgitated material from Gascoigne, Tarleton, Greene, and Marlowe (1.115).

Perhaps worst of all, the detractor engages in detraction with no moral end in mind. Early in the debate, in the *Foure Letters* (1592), Harvey appears to concede a point to his rival, remarking upon Nashe's wit. But he hastens to qualify the compliment: "Fine plesant witt was euer commendable: and iudiciall accusation lawfull: but fie on grosse scurility and impudent calumny: that wil rather goe to Hell in iest, then to heauen in earnest, and seeke not to reform any vice, to backebite, and depraue euery person, that feedeth not their humorous fancy" (1.204). Detraction falls short of pleasant wit and judicial accusation by neglecting the moral perspective from which Harvey makes this distinction. Greene and Nashe, in their short-sighted pursuit of fame, have overlooked the more far-reaching effects of their works: "I pray God," writes Harvey, "they have not done more harm by corruption of manners, then good by quickening of wit" (1.190). Wit will not save the detractor. The fact that he disregards the moral end of detraction, Harvey indicates, does not prevent it from having one.

In the *Four Letters* and *Pierces Supererogation* (1593), Harvey is determined to illustrate the social impact of that moral end and to establish the threat posed to the commonwealth by detraction. Making this point forces him to expand the scope and to generalize the terms of his metacritical argument. The impudence of Nashe in challenging the integrity and compromising the dignity of Harvey, his elder and intellectual superior (at least in terms of accreditation), becomes the threat posed by detraction to the vast structures of hierarchy that were the mainstay of the Elizabethan world: “honor is precious; worship of value; Fame invaluable; they perilously threaten the commonwealth that go above to violate the inviolable parts thereof” (1.165). By threatening “God and good order” (1.203), the detractor threatens to reduce the world to “Vniuersall Topsy-tur[v]y” (2.131). A signally destructive form of the critic, the detractor inhibits learning, peace, and prosperity, both literary and civic.

It is in this context that Harvey most effectively consolidates his and our understanding of the detractor as a critical type. Beyond lumping together Greene, Nashe, Lyly, Elderton, the Martinists and anti-Martinists alike into the category of the detractor, this civic line of argumentation gives him occasion to further define and anneal that category with classical types and a touch of *paralipsis*:

I neither name Martin-mar-prelate: nor shame Papp wyth a hatchet: nor mention any other, but *Elderton*, and *Greene*: two notorious mates, & the very ringleaders of the riming, and scribbling crew. But *Titius*, or rather *Zoilus* in his spitefull vaine, will so long flurt at *Homer*: and *Thersites*, in his peeuish moode, so long fling at *Agamemnon*: that they wil become extremely odious & intollerable to all good Learning, and ciuill Gouvernement: and in attempting to pull downe, or disgrace other without order, must needes finally ouerthrow themselues without relief.

(1.164)

Harvey here contains the wild variety and unpredictable novelty of the Elizabethan detractor by aligning him with a classical type represented by Zoilus, the infamous critic of Homer,

and Thersites, the deformed back-biter of Homer's *Iliad*. More interesting, however, is the way that this passage at once deflates the imposing figure of the detractor, reducing him to an old – nay, ancient – joke, while managing at the same time not to underestimate the threat posed by detraction. As Jonathan Crewe has shown, to Harvey and others, Nashe appeared both trifling and terrible, both cricket and serpent (3-4, 19). If the detractor, like the “universal wolf” of Shakespeare's Ulysses, ultimately overthrows himself, he manages in the process to become “extremely odious & intollerable to all good Learning, and ciuill Gouvernement.”

Here the detractor parts company with the pedant. Like the pedant, the detractor presents an unproductive model of criticism; like the pedant, the detractor must therefore be dismissed. Yet, adding Momus, the god of reprehension and carping, to his list of classical antecedents, Harvey implies that the dismissal of the detractor demands a certain urgency that the dismissal of the pedant does not:

Momus gainst Heauen; and Zoilus gainst Earth,
A Quipp for Gibeline: and whip for Guelph.
Or purge this humour: or woe-worth the State,
That long endures the one, or other mate.

(1.252)

If the pedant is intricately useless, he is also relatively harmless, a fact confirmed by his secure position as the butt of countless jokes on the early modern comic stage. The detractor, however – the jester as opposed to the jest – not only threatens the future of English poetry, drama, and criticism but promises to bring woe to the entire state. Whereas it was precisely by not taking him seriously that the pedant was overcome both on stage and off, the detractor, as we shall see, demanded to be taken seriously and was.

II. On the Extraordinary Beauty of Detraction

Other early modern English writers corroborate those features of the detractor noted by Harvey in Nashe, including critical indiscretion. The “distraction” of the “Detracter,” observes poet and minister John Andrewes, causes “all places, times, and men / without distinction [to] seeme alike.”³ Harvey also stands on solid ground in his attempt to expose the moral and political implications of critical detraction. In doing so he simply brings the idea full circle, for the legacy of the detractor has its roots in moral and political philosophy, categories which were often loosely conceived and only nominally distinct in early modern England. The word *detraction* would have called to mind for English parishioners that quasi-tautological⁴ phrase from the twenty-fourth Proverb so often invoked in its discussion: *abominatio hominum detractor*, or “the scorner is an abomination vnto men” (Geneva, Proverbs 24:9). It would also have recalled the ninth commandment against bearing false witness, as it did for Bishop of London Edmund Bonner.⁵ These scriptural points of reference evoke the capacity of detraction to disrupt community, whether through the loathing and slander of one’s neighbor (*abominatio hominum*) or the abuse of the law in false accusation. “Foule-mouthed detraction, is his neighbours foe,” advises the commonplace book.⁶

The moral threat that detraction poses to individual and community alike was perhaps first registered as a commonplace in England in *The banket of sapience* (1539), a collection of moral adages compiled by Sir Thomas Elyot. The reader who thumbed

³ In a poem entitled “Of the Detracter.” See Andrewes, sig. E1v.

⁴ The *OED* notes at “abominable, a.” that in the early modern period, a false etymology of the word derived from “ab homine” not only affected its spelling (indeed, the Latin sometimes appears as “abhominatio” in the period) but “influenced the use and has permanently affected the meaning of the word.”

⁵ *A Profitable and Necessary Doctrine* (London: 1555), sigs. SSiii^r-v.

⁶ Nicholas Ling, *Politephnia Wits common wealth* (London: 1598), sig. 155^r.

through that oft-reprinted volume to the entry on “Detraction” would have learned from St. Paul that detractors are denied salvation – that is, excluded from the community of the elect – and from Cicero that detraction is more unnatural than any other “discomoditie” whether “exteriour or bodely.”⁷ John Heywood picks up on the bodily discommodity of detraction in *A ballad against slander and detraction* (1562), where he compares detraction to the murder of infants in that both acts are equally destructive and neither can be undone. Both unnaturally divide that which God made whole, the one the microcosmic body and the other the macrocosmic community.

Moral allegorists follow Ovid in associating detraction with poison, and specifically with poisonous breath, tongue, or tooth.⁸ Barnabe Googe, whose *Ship of safeguard* (1569) must sail past the treacherous rock of Detraction, describes the poisonous vapors that continually rise from the isle (Bviii). Edmund Spenser, who personifies Detraction in the fifth book of the *Faerie Queene* (1596), depicts her foaming at the mouth with poison (5.12.36).⁹ It perhaps goes without saying that a contained poison poses no threat; its destructive power depends upon a vehicle of transfer, whether the striking fang or the unremarkable glass of claret. Just so, the power of detraction depends upon publication, a fact that begins to explain the alignment of the critic with the detractor, two figures that similarly mediate between a subject and a third party in the absence of the subject. Detraction outdoes Envy in the *Faerie Queene* by giving vent to the bile that Envy contains, “publishing” rumor, and “spreading abroad” her ill thoughts (5.12.33-5).

⁷ (London: 1539), sigs. C^v-Cⁱⁱr.

⁸ The figure of Envy, whose “lingua est suffusa veneno” (777), appears in the second book of the *Metamorphoses*.

⁹ All citations of *The Faerie Queene* refer to the Roche edition.

By setting Detraction in allegorical opposition to Justice (Artegall) and Peace (Irena), Spenser anticipates Richard Brathwaite's sense of detraction as a perversion of the social bond of friendship (69). An enemy to "fame" (Googe Bvii^v) and "mens good name" (*FQ* 5.12.33), the detractor assails "the good" with what Brathwaite calls "personall calumniation" (71), that is, a falsified *argumentum ad hominem*. Repeated denunciations across early modern English literature of the slanderous personal abuse of the innocent at the hands of the vile detractor establish a structural relationship that permits John Andrewes to equate the blame of the detractor with the praise of the just and to console the "Detracted" with the notion that detraction may actually increase their virtue (E2^r-E3^v). "[W]isdome loues that, which offe[n]ds detraction," writes anthologist Robert Allott.¹⁰ The moral and discursive dynamic signaled by the word *detraction* obtains such rigid definition as to determine the moral status of the detracted sight unseen. For Googe, to be detracted is to join company with Moses, Job, and Christ (Bviii^v-Ci^v).

Thomas Elyot directly addresses the political implications of detraction in the third book of *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531). Following Lucian, who had observed that slander thrives "in the atmosphere of dominion and power" (5),¹¹ Elyot describes detraction as a vice "moche conuersant amonge men in authoritie" (2.417).¹² Limning what was to become a familiar dynamic, he explains that detraction enables those "offended" by justice (2.419) to undermine the standing of those who have their minds ever fixed on "the trouthe and the publike weale of [their] contray" (2.418-9). Bending the ear of authority, and undertaking to distract, the detractor diminishes the "credence" of such servants of the state

¹⁰ *Englands Parnassus* (London: 1600), sig. A5^r.

¹¹ All citations of Lucian refer to the Fowler edition.

¹² All citations of *The Boke Named the Governour* refer to the Croft edition.

by obscuring their record of service – that is, their deeds – with false charges in regards to their “maners” (2.420). The threat posed to the commonwealth by detraction is clear to Elyot: “Of one thing am I sure, that by detraction ... many good wittes haue bene drowned, as also vertue, and paynfull study haue [bene] unrewarded, and many zelatours or fauourers of the publyke weale haue benne discouraged” (2.426).

One such case, at least in Spenser’s reading of it, was that of Arthur Grey, Lord Deputy of Ireland and the poet’s onetime employer, who supplies the composite signified for the detracted figures of Artegall and Talus in Book V of the *Faerie Queene*. Another is that of the ancient Greek painter Apelles, who was imprisoned upon false charges as a traitor to the Pharaoh Ptolemy I Soter. After a good word from a fellow prisoner won him his release and the remorse and remuneration of the Pharaoh, Apelles “took his revenge upon slander [Διαβολή, Calumnia, Elyot’s “Detraction”]” (Lucian 2) in an allegorical painting, which Lucian describes, Elyot describes second-hand from Lucian, and Botticelli recreates at the end of the fifteenth century (fig. 3). Botticelli’s *Calunnia* can be seen at the center of the painting dragging Innocence by the hair to a willing auditor. Truth and Repentance lag behind.

After describing the painting in great detail, Lucian attempts a portrait of his own, and the picture that emerges clearly displays those features of the detractor enumerated by Sidney, Harvey, Spenser, and so many other early modern English writers. Διαβολή appears as a cowardly (4) perversion of proper judgment which “offends justice, law, and piety” (3) and indiscriminately lays waste to “goodness” (5). Lucian joins Harvey – or rather Harvey, Lucian – in exposing the detractor’s self-interested will to distraction by identifying detraction as a desperate resource of the “ill qualified” (6). Most interesting of all, however, is an essential feature of detraction as yet unaddressed in these pages, which Lucian gleans

from the painting of Apelles and which we can appreciate in Botticelli's reproduction: namely, her extraordinary beauty (2). Lucian acknowledges two allegorical valences of this feature. First, it accounts for the importance of plausibility in detraction. Detraction "would never prevail against truth, that strongest of all things, if it were not dressed up into really attractive bait" (5). The claims of the detractor must be attractive enough to be accepted by the third party without trial (7). The second and, for our purposes, more important valence of the beauty of detraction is pleasure. Just as the destructive power of detraction depends upon publication, so publication depends upon the interest and credence – or, in economic terms, the demand – of the third party, which pleasure guarantees. "We all delight, I cannot tell why," Lucian observes, "in whisperings and insinuations. I know people whose ears are as agreeably titillated with slander as their skin with a feather" (9). Lucian's English inheritors knew such people, too.

The beauty of detraction accounts for the ascendancy of the detractor in Elizabethan England through the figure of Martin Marprelate. Seeking to draw the embattled issue of the episcopacy into a "proto-public sphere of debate" (Black, *Martin*, xvii), the authors behind the Marprelate tracts¹³ turned to rhetorical considerations of style and market considerations of appeal and pleasure, as Martin himself explains:

I saw the cause of Christ's government, and of the bishops' antichristian dealing, to be hidden. The most part of men could not be gotten to read anything written in the defense of the one and against the other. I bethought me therefore of a way whereby men might be drawn to do both, perceiving the humors of men in these times (especially of those that are in any place) to be given to mirth. I took that course.

(115)¹⁴

¹³ The identities of the authors remain uncertain. Black, however, provides an admirably measured investigation of the issue, paying special attention to prime candidates John Penry and Job Throkmorton. See Black, *Martin*, pp. xxxiv–xlvi.

¹⁴ All citations of the Marprelate tracts refer to the Black edition.

That course produced seven enormously popular pamphlets, each printed secretly and illegally by an itinerant underground press, which flummoxed sober apologists of the established church with scurrilous satire. The appeal of the tracts derived from their Tarleton-esque theatricality,¹⁵ their social and rhetorical subversiveness,¹⁶ and above all their “depraving [of] the liues and doings of Bishoppes” (Cooper 34). Such depravation only benefitted from the misguided attempts of the bishops to answer seriously charges of theft, lechery, and bowling on the Sabbath: “man may haue his meate dressed for his health vpon the Sabbath, and why may he not then haue some conuenient exercise of the body... ?” (Cooper 57). As Joseph Black has observed, what made the tracts novel and exciting was not their ecclesiology, which was essentially the Presbyterian stance of Thomas Cartwright, but rather their “polemical aggressiveness” and their ad hominem attacks upon high-ranking church officials (*Martin* xix, xxvii). Martin’s innovation was a stylistic one, and its success in capturing the interest of English readers can be gauged by Bishop Bancroft’s proposal that the church hire such writers as John Lyly and Thomas Nashe to answer Martin in his own vein of anonymous raillery (*Martin* lxi).

Powerful as it was, however, the appeal of that style was not universal, and Martin made enemies not just within the episcopacy but among Presbyterians and self-declared neutrals as well. John Udall and Thomas Cartwright disowned him (Black, *Martin*, xxxi), and writers from Gabriel Harvey to Francis Bacon sidestepped the ecclesiological debate by charging Martinists and anti-Martinists alike with indecorum.¹⁷ Although Bacon curiously

¹⁵ See Coolidge. On the nonconformist roots of this theatricality, see Kendall, pp. 173-212.

¹⁶ See Hill, p. 100, and Anselment.

¹⁷ See Bacon, “Advertisement,” *passim*, e.g., “it is more than time that there were an end and surcease made of this immodest and deformed manner of writing lately entertained, whereby matter of

downplays the civic threat posed by the Martinists (“Advertisement” 35-6), the order to investigate their secret press came directly from the Queen (Black, *Martin*, lvii). Cooper expressed a widespread fear in his prognostication that “if this outrageous spirit of boldnesse be not stopped speedily, I feare he wil proue himself to bee, not onely *Mar-prelate*, but *Mar-prince*, *Mar-state*, *Mar-lawe*, *Mar-magistrate*, and all together, vntill he bring it to an Anabaptisticall equality and communitie” (36). The threat Martin posed to social hierarchy and civic order, in addition to his popular appeal, his cowardly anonymity, his predilection for *argumentum ad hominem*, and the “ambition” (3), destructiveness (11), and lack of brotherly charity (9) noted by the anonymous author of *A myrror for Martinists* (1590), showed him for what he was: a detractor.¹⁸

Cooper certainly recognized him as such and made good use of the likeness to marginalize Martin and contain the threat he posed by reducing him to a familiar type, much as Harvey would Nashe just a few years later. This process begins as early as the title page of Cooper’s *Admonition* (1589), which bears the epigraph “*Detractor & libens auditor, uterque / Diabolum portat in lingua*,” that is, both the detractor and his willing audience carry the devil in their tongues. It continues in richly encoded charges of indiscretion (56), cowardice (96),¹⁹ and hypocrisy (96); an invocation of Solomon’s adage, *abominatio hominum detractor* (65); and a comparison of Martin to Momus (73). And it culminates in the description of a painting that resolves any doubt as to the identity of Cooper’s adversary: “I sawe his figure drawen and set forth in a table when I was a yong man: the paynter was one very nigh of his kinne: His

religion is handled in the stile of the stage” (32) or “As for all direct or indirect glances, or levels at men’s persons, they were ever in these cases disallowed” (59). See also Harvey, 2.126-221, *passim*, e.g., “It was Martins folly, to begin that cutting vaine: some others ouersight, to continue it” (2.131) or “When the question is *de Re*; to dispute *de Homine* is sophisticall” (2.167).

¹⁸ (London: 1590). The work has on occasion been attributed to Nashe.

¹⁹ Note also the poison inherent in Cooper’s comparison of Martin to “a Serpent byting secretly.”

name was Lucian. The figure vvas this, An ancient man of some authoritie sate vpon the iudgement seate....” (94). Cooper goes on to fill out the details of the ancient allegorical painting of Apelles as described in turn by Lucian and Elyot, filling the role of Διαβολή, Calumnia, or Detraction with “M. Martin M” (94).

Misguided though his response to Martin may have been, Cooper reveals his understanding of the powerful appeal commanded by Martin by including that crucial detail of beauty from his sources. Martin appears “trimmed handsomelie for his better credite, and not a wrinkle awrie in his garment” (94). Cooper defends his reader from falling prey to that beauty by positioning it within a controlling frame:

In the toppe of the Table this sentence was written, *Whosoener slaundereth honest men, shall come to iust punishment.* In the lovver part is this, *Nothing can bee safe from the backbiting tongue.* Rounde about was this vvritten, *Beware thou neyther slaunder nor giue eare vnto the back-biter. Flee slaundering both with thine eares, & with thy tongue. He that giueth faire countenance & light eare, encourageth a backebiter.* If *Martin* that delighteth so much in himself, would discreetly behold this table, I trust he would diminish some part of his folly.

(95)

The frame contains the appeal of detraction just as the rigidly defined and thoroughly demonized type of the detractor contains the unknown quantity that was Martin Marprelate. Like Lucian and Elyot before him, Cooper allegorically accounts for the appeal of detraction while undermining the stable functionality of that appeal.

Cooper did not succeed in silencing Martin. And though the state ultimately did – tracking down, trying, and executing the operators of the press and its suspected authors – Martin lived on through the fin-de-siècle trend of satire that produced such works as Thomas Lodge’s *A Fig for Momus* (1595), Joseph Hall’s *Virgidemiae* (1597, 1598), John Marston’s *Scourge of Villainy* (1598), and Everard Guilpin’s *Skialethia* (1598). The potent spirit of subversion that endured in English satire even after Martin’s demise led to the Bishops’

Ban of 1599, which forbade satire in broad strokes and called in previously printed works to be burned.²⁰ Yet by the end of the century, the Presbyterian cause was weaker than it had been in decades, partly because of Martin. His success, like his innovation, was stylistic in nature and exclusively so; as a reformer, he failed. He thus introduced a wide English readership not only to the extraordinary beauty of detraction but also to its limitations. It may be, as Joseph Black suggests, that Martin's concessions to popular appeal jarred with the absolutism of the Presbyterian agenda (Black, *Martin*, xxxiv). Or perhaps Martin simply chose a rhetorical mode that won him appeal at the expense of persuasion, readers at the expense of followers. Perhaps the lesson that Martin learned at great expense for the benefit of the English literary market is that appeal, and especially the kind of appeal that arises from what Philip Sidney calls "scornful tickling," often serves no end beyond itself. The questions raised by the Marprelate controversy concerning the relationship between learning and laughter and the viability of detraction as an instrument of reform soon reemerge in the context of literary criticism as the type of the detractor, haunted by the ghost of Martin Marprelate, is applied to the English idea of the critic.

III. Momus, Zoilus, and the Critic as Detractor

The most effective means of marginalizing the figure of the detractor in early modern England was, strangely enough, to construct a tradition around it. The trick to silencing detraction was not to silence it but rather to grant it as constant and ubiquitous a voice as possible. A survey of early modern English writing on the topic quickly convinces us that there was no time before detraction and that nothing and no one is free from it. It is a point often made with reference to Momus, the god of reprehension and carping whom Harvey invokes in the *Four Letters*. Even those detractors who strike us as most

²⁰ See McCabe.

threateningly novel, as Martin Marprelate doubtless struck his contemporaries, can be contained by this figure, their original. Cooper manages the maneuver in a single word, calling his detractor “*Martin Momus*” (73), and Bishop John Aylmer, defending himself in Cooper’s pages, draws the same comparison (58).²¹ Momus effectively bridges between English discussions of detraction and literary criticism in the early modern period. As a fixture of the former, he was an obvious point of reference for writers anxious to defend themselves from the malicious, or even just the wiser, pens of their critics. More often than not, we find him paired in this critical context with Zoilus, the Sophistic author of the *Homeromastix* and thus the archetypal critic of the archetypal poet. Through these two figures, which stand in hendiadys for the idea of the detractor, literary criticism is reduced to detraction, and the claims of the critic are dismissed a priori.

A glance at the English dictionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reveals the communion of these figures and their increasingly focused application to the idea of the critic. In Thomas Elyot’s dictionary of 1538, the critical context had yet to coalesce. Momus appears as “the god of reprehencion,” and Zoilus, with somewhat more versatility, appears both literally as “a poete, whyche enuyed Homerus” and figuratively as a catchall for “the enuiers of welle lerned men.”²² By 1578, however, Zoilus had turned his attention from learning to works, as Thomas Cooper indicates: “Of him, all malitious carpers of other mens works be called *Zoili*.”²³ John Florio appeals to both Momus and Zoilus at the end of the century to define the Italian *appuntino*, “a nice peeuish finde-fault, a Momus, a Zoilus, a

²¹ See Black, “Rhetoric,” p. 710.

²² “Momus” and “Zoilus” in *The dictionary of syr Thomas Eliot knyght* (London: 1538).

²³ “Zoilus” in *Thesaurus linguae Romanae & Britannicae* (London: 1578).

carper.”²⁴ By the mid-seventeenth century, as Edward Phillips suggests in his gloss on Zoilus, the association of detraction and criticism had been firmly established: “From him every envious carping Critick is called a Zoilus.”²⁵

Zoilus, Momus, and their sundry associates and offspring crowd the prefaces, epistles dedicatory, and various other paratexts of early modern English literature, though they were not restricted to that domain. Their ubiquity is for the English writers of that era something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, for they are everywhere telling us that Zoilus and Momus are everywhere. Lest we write too secure, they hasten to remind us that “Zoilus impes as yet do carping liue.”²⁶ Meanwhile, they themselves entreat their patrons to defend them from “the swynish crew of rayling ZOILVS and flowting MOMVS.”²⁷ They defy the “secte” of Momus and the “bande” of Zoilus as a unified mob of indiscriminate, slanderous detractors who “rather finde fault with the man, then with the matter, be it neuer so well.”²⁸ They urge the would-be “mate” of Momus and “sonne” of Zoilus to create something of their own rather than tear down the creations of others.²⁹ They thus attribute to these ancient figures those features of the detractor noted by Harvey in Nashe from indiscretion to the self-interested will to distraction. Those features serve to make the detractor knowable, identifiable, even familiar, and therefore less threatening.

²⁴ “Appuntino, Appuntatore” in *A worlde of wordes* (London: 1598).

²⁵ “Zoilus” in *The new world of English words* (London: 1658).

²⁶ John Higgins, *The first parte of the Mirour for magistrates* (London: 1574), sig. 34^r.

²⁷ Phillip Stubbes, *Anatomie of Abuses* (London: 1583), sig. ¶4^v.

²⁸ Robert Hitchcock, *A pollitique platt for the honour of the Prince* (London: 1580), sig. **ii^r.

²⁹ Thomas Howell, *His deuises, for his owne exercise, and his friends pleasure* (London: 1581), sig. Dii^v.

We can rely on the fact that Momus's tongue is never still and Zoilus's mouth is always open.³⁰ "Momus will haue a mouth full of inuectiues," and "Zoilus should not be Zoilus if hee were not squint eide."³¹ Their constancy in this regard, added to their putative ubiquity in time and space, paves the way for their dismissal. Zoilus rails, Momus carps, the sun rises and sets, and honest writers go on writing; it has always been so. Envy is simply a part of life, and what Spenser calls "vile Zoilus backbitings vaine"³² is likewise a part of the writing life. "Homer had his Zoilus, Virgill his Meuius, Cicero his Lycinius, yea, the Gods themselues had theyr Momus,"³³ so who are we to complain? From this perspective, we might even consider it a kind of honor to be dogged by a Momus or a Zoilus of our own era. We should, like the poet Richard Robinson, be "well content to beare with their barking, as many vvorthy Clarkes heretofore haue done, and doe daylye."³⁴ Yet if we are content to bear it, we needn't take it too seriously.

While poets and other writers found in the constancy and ubiquity of the detractor a way around him, the same cannot be said of the critic. As the heavily footnoted paragraphs above only begin to reveal, the ideological structure – the dense network of texts and contexts – equating the critic with the detractor was formidable. That equation fuels the anxiety with which Immerito exposes his "little book" to barking envy at the outset of *The*

³⁰ John Carr, "Against all carpers and finde faultes," *The ruinous fal of prodigalitie* (London: 1573), sig. Bii^r.

³¹ Robert Armin, *Tarltons newes out of purgatorie* (London: 1590), sig. A2^r.

³² "To the right honourable the Lord of Buckhurst, one of her Maiesties Priuie Counsell" in Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, p. 30, l. 14.

³³ Robert Allott, *Wits theater of the little world* (London: 1599), sig. 246^r.

³⁴ *The rewarde of wickednesse* (London: 1574), sig. A2^r.

Shepheardes Calender (1579).³⁵ It ensures the potency of the threat with which Philocosmus attempts to sway Musophilus from the writing of poetry:

Besides, some viperous Criticke may bereaue
Th'opinion of thy worth for some defect;
And get more reputation of his wit,
By, but controlling of some word or sence,
Then thou shalt honour for contriuing it,
With all thy trauell, care and diligence³⁶

It guides Fulke Greville's word choice in arguing, in his *Treatie of Humane Learning* (pub. 1633),³⁷ that "the [proper] vse of Knowledge is not strife, / To contradict, and Criticall become."³⁸ It furnishes the figs that Lodge, Guilpin, and Dekker independently offer to Momus, Zoilus, and all of the "new found Colledge of *Criticks*."³⁹ "[T]ake heed of *Criticks*," Dekker warns his readers in *Newes from hell* (1606), for "they bite (like fish) at any thing, especially at bookes" (A4^v). The equation of the critic and the detractor informs and is increasingly reinforced by a seemingly countless number of such admonitions, exhortations, and imprecations. Together they produce a dominant and overwhelmingly negative idea of the critic, an idea that drew strength from the willingness of stung writers like John Florio to fill it out with Boschian grotesquery, castigating with relish "those notable Pirates in this our paper-sea, those sea-dogs, or lande-Critikes, monsters of men, if not beastes rather than men; whose teeth are Canibals, their toongs adder-forks, their lips aspes-poyson, their eyes

³⁵ Spenser, *Shorter Poems*, p. 24.

³⁶ *Musophilus*, ll. 54-9, in Daniel, *Works*.

³⁷ On the composition and publication of this work, see p. 119 n. 18 above.

³⁸ *Treatie*, st. 141, in Greville, *Certaine*.

³⁹ *The guls horne-booke* (London: 1609), sig. B1^v.

basiliskes, their breath the breath of a grave, their wordes like Swordes of Turkes, that strive which shall dive deepest into a Christian lying bound before them.”⁴⁰

Despite the odds, however, a minority of critics ranging in station from university dons to university wits courageously opposed the equation of the critic with the detractor, but never without difficulty or with unqualified success. An Oxford quarrel which grew to a public debate with the 1599 publication of John Rainolds’ *Th’ Overthrow of Stage-Playes* subjected the equation to academic dispute.⁴¹ Although on its surface the quarrel between the antitheatrical Rainolds and his opponents addresses the propriety of stage plays, chiefly with regard to the Mosaic proscription against cross-dressing invoked by Gosson and later laid to rest by John Selden, the means by which William Gager, the Latin dramatist of Christ’s College, waged his end of the quarrel raised the question of the proper role and true identity of the critic. Gager demonstrates his facility with the conventional resources of critical marginalization in a prologue addressed “AD CRITICUM” in his *Ulysses Redux* (1592). There he reduces all critics to railing Zoili and all criticism to futility (*futiles*). In the same year, Gager penned a dramatic epilogue to be staged after a performance of Seneca’s *Hippolyta*. It features a rough and railing Momus who appeared, to Rainolds and others, to parrot Rainolds’ own case against stage plays, although Gager himself denied the application.⁴² When Momus runs out of breath, the dramatist offers a response that both answers the critic’s claims and delineates those commonplace features that serve as grounds for his dismissal: his “harsh style [styli durus]”, his “foul tongue [lingua ... foeda],” the

⁴⁰ *A worlde of wordes* (London: 1598), sig. A5^v.

⁴¹ My account of the debate draws upon the entries for William Gager and John Rainolds in the ODNB, the introductory matter to Dana F. Sutton’s edition of Gager’s “Letter to John Rainolds” (see Gager, “Letter”), and Boas, pp. 232-51.

⁴² See the first paragraph of Gager’s letter to Rainolds (Gager, “Letter”), where he imputes Rainolds’ charge of application and denies it.

indiscriminate nature of his detraction (“deos / Hominesque, naturamque carpenti impie”), his ubiquity (“Quis huius oris spiritum effugiat gravem?”), and the origin of his envy in a lack of talent (“Nihil ipse praestans”) (487-518, tr. Sutton). In his own words, Gager employs Momus “as we commonly take him, as a carper, and a pincher of all things that are done with any opinion of well doinge” (“Letter,” par. 3). He hoped this explanation would clear him from the charge of application.

But Rainolds’ objection to Gager’s employment of this idea of the critic transcends the personal and stems from a more thoughtful basis than the imputed failure to recognize the gesture as commonplace. In a letter to Gager printed in *Th’ Overthrow*, Rainolds connects Gager’s invocation of Momus with his invocation of Zoilus in *Ulysses Redux*. Granting the possibility that the dramatist aims at no one beyond Zoilus and Momus in these instances, Rainolds remarks that they nevertheless encompass and trivialize all critics: “you note vs all, in [Momus], as vniust reproouers of playes ... if anie finde such fault with your Tragedie [*Ulysses Redux*] ... you will not denie but you meane to note him as a malicious Zoilus, and a carping Criticke” (2). The effect of both portraits is to cut off critical discourse at the knees. In Rainolds’ estimation, that is, Gager, like so many others, had invoked Momus and Zoilus as a means of dismissing the claims of his critics a priori. Rainolds makes this point while proffering an alternative, scriptural rather than classical critical model:

as our Savior when he was smitten by one for speaking nought but reason, saide, If I haue spoken evill, beare witnesse of the evill; but if well, why doest thou smite me? so they, whose obiections against playes you attributed to the person of Momus, & thereby noted them as vniust reproouers, might iustlie say in my iudgement; If our reasons be naught, discover their naughtines; if good, why doe you Mome vs?

(1)

If Gager has provided Oxford with a laugh at Rainolds’ expense, he has meanwhile left his claims unanswered. Rational critical discourse concerning the moral implications and social

effects of stage plays is too important to be given short shrift by a hackneyed ruse. Rainolds perceives the threat posed to the future of such discourse by the equation of the critic and the detractor, and he opposes that equation by restyling the carping of Momus as the “reason” of Christ.

Thomas Lodge contains his challenge to detraction in the very title of his *A Fig for Momus* (1595). He reveals the metacritical implications of that challenge in a dedicatory epistle to “the Gentlemen Readers *whatsoever*,” which distinguishes between detraction and more productive modes of reading and criticism: “*I entitle my booke (A fig for Momus,) not in contempt of the learned, for I honor them: not in disdaine of the wel minded, because they cherish science; but in despite of the detractor, who hauing no learning to iudge, wanteth no libertie to reprove*” (A3^r). The distinction differentiates between those readers learned or charitable enough to honor his endeavor and the spiteful detractor, freed from the bounds of proper judgment by a lack of learning and decency. He welcomes “reasonable” criticism but promises the mere railer a “gird” or lashing (A4^r). Like Hall, Marston, Guilpin, and other critical satirists who follow him, Lodge fights fire with fire, opposing detraction with detraction: “*UUhere detraction is giuen to challenge, it is good striking first, for whelpes that are whipt for brauling, are quicklie quiet*” (A3^v).

In the epistle to Michael Drayton placed toward the end of the work, the distinction made at the outset becomes even clearer. “[S]currility,” “rayling,” and “detraction” fail both poetically and critically for two reasons. First, they neglect those “happie ends” that must be the goal of all literary work (H2^v-H3^r), the same oversight that Harvey attributes to Nashe and Greene. Second, Apelles notwithstanding, detraction fails to please. To attempt to please a reader with “rayling and detraction, / Proper to Momus, and his hatefull faction” is to attempt to “wash a More” or to “drie the seas” (H3^r). Here, rather than leave it to nameless learned and well-minded readers, Lodge himself embodies a critical alternative to

detraction by seriously considering the moral ends of poetry and charitably, if briefly, engaging with the cosmology of Drayton's *Endimion and Phoebe* (1595).

The threat of envy and critical detraction underwritten by what Joseph Hall terms “the curiositie of these nicer times” (97)⁴³ leads him, as a young emerging poet, to choose “lowly” satire over more ambitious forms.⁴⁴ He addresses this choice in the “Defiance to Enuie” that prefaces, and in some sense governs, the two books of his *Virgidemiae* (1597, 1598):

*Nay : let the prouder Pines of Ida feare
The sudden fires of heauen...
Stand ye secure, ye safer shrubs below...*

(1-7)

The persona that speaks to us from the *Virgidemiae* appears to grow directly out of the word with which the collection, and this passage, begins: *nay*. Anticipating the “causelesse wrongs” (12) and “wrongful spight” (26) of his critics, just as Immerito anticipates the barking of envy, Hall opposes them by aiming low as a poet and laying claim to a crabbed and deeply pessimistic muse that he routinely describes as “scornful” and “careless,” suggesting both insouciance and a lack of poetic ambition. With few exceptions, his satirist rejects contemporary English poetry in the “Poeticall” satires of Book I with a peremptory *nay*. Generally, he observes that Parnassus has been “turned to the stewes” (1.2.17) by the “bastard Poets” (1.2.37) of England, whose frozen minds, when steeped in drink, “Exhale out filthy smoke and stinking steames” like “frozen Dung-hils” in the sun (1.3.1-6). Specifically, cloaking his charges with the thinnest of veils, Hall goes after Marlowe, Nashe,

⁴³ All citations of the works of Joseph Hall refer to the Davenport edition.

⁴⁴ Corthell provides a Helgersonian reading of the *Virgidemiae* in which Hall struggles to fashion a literary career “in the shadow of Spenser” (60) and in the context of a pessimistic assessment of the late-Elizabethan literary scene filtered through “the dark side of the Golden Age myth” (53). I am indebted to his insightful reading in what follows.

Greene, Daniel, and other English poets.⁴⁵ Following Juvenal and Persius,⁴⁶ he skewers the kinds from amorous verse to complaint poetry and rails against the indecorum both of religious poetry and the English hexameter.

A particularly vexed critical identity emerges from this attempt to forestall detraction with detraction. Though he scoffs at “our Poets in high Parliament,” whose self-proclaimed critical authority he presents as arbitrary (1.3.45-52), he nevertheless reveals a need for such authority by indicating the inability of writers to judge themselves:

*Write they that can, tho they that cannot doe :
But who knowes that, but they that doe not know?*

(2.1.7-8)

Confidence in one’s ability to write betrays ignorance of the true criteria of good writing, much as, in the old Socratic paradox, the profession of ignorance betrays true wisdom. To know that one can write is to be ignorant of what writing is, and to know this is to profess some critical knowledge beyond the ken of the writer. In this and other select moments of the *Virgidemiae*, Hall stands on the brink of isolating the intellectual domain unique to the critic and the principle that will allow him to realize a metacritical facet of the “further good” he targets with his satires (99). It seems possible in such moments that the criteria that inform his critical detraction will emerge in positive expression, thus revealing its productive capacity. But Hall ultimately steers the *Virgidemiae* toward a conclusive *nay*. The lone satire

⁴⁵ His specificity in this regard, and scholarly consensus over it, varies. For an overview of Hall’s assessment of his contemporaries in the *Virgidemiae*, see Hall, pp. xli-lx.

⁴⁶ To be sure, the critical content of Elizabethan satire was as much an obeisance to classical tradition as it was a response to the circumstances of the contemporary literary market. Following Juvenal and Persius, Hall and others employ critical or “poetical” satire as a preparative to moral satire, and critical concerns are therefore subordinated, sometimes rather violently, to moral ones (Corthell 55-57; Lecocq 157-8). This fact, further complicated by the distance between artist and satirist at the ironic heart of formal satire (Kernan 28), colors but should not diminish the critical value of the observations under consideration here. If classical tradition creates a space for criticism within formal satire, it does not determine the specific content of that criticism. If Juvenal sets the tone of Hall’s criticism, Hall’s choice of Juvenal as a model remains his own.

of Book VI hinges upon an ironic recanting of the previous satires that nevertheless signals a genuine retreat from criticism for Hall, as he makes clear in the postscript to the reader. Hall's satirist is at length overwhelmed by the spirit of a curious age, a spirit that finds more favor in Labeo and his like, the objects of Hall's detraction. In hindsight, his critical endeavor looks "thanklesse" (99).

John Marston responds to Hall's critical detraction in a metacritical satire of his own that seeks to redeem both satire and criticism from what he terms "our modern critic's envious eye" (84).⁴⁷ "Satire IV: Reactio" from *The Metamorphosis of Pigmaliions Image and Certain Satyres* (1598) addresses Hall's rough handling of English poetry with an almost line-by-line directness. Aghast at his bad judgment, Marston's satirist can only attribute Hall's vicious critical attack to the insatiable hunger of envy, ironically enough, the very appetite that Hall had set out to defy. Beyond reproving his judgment, Marston takes issue with the manner or style of Hall's criticism, which he summarily describes as "vile detraction" (4). Comparing Hall to Plutarch's Grillus (31), that lamentable victim of Circe who chose to remain a beast even after the intervention of Odysseus, Marston presents detraction as bestial and crude:

So have I seen a cur dog in the street
Piss 'gainst the fairest posts he still could meet

(119-20)⁴⁸

Worse still, detraction is cowardly, singular, and amateurish: cowardly, because, like a dog barking at the moon, the detractor rails under cover of darkness or anonymity (9-10); singular, because it stems not from sound judgment but from the eccentric whims of a sick

⁴⁷ All citations of Marston's works refer to the Bullen edition.

⁴⁸ It bears noting that Marston himself is depicted as a dog pissing against the world in the second part of the *Return from Parnassus*, 1.2.267.

man who can find dirt in even the tidiest room (13-14; his urine reveals his sickness at 125-7); and amateurish, because “Who cannot rail?” (155).

As Marston enumerates the archetypal details of Hall’s failure as a critic, the criteria against which he measures his opponent begin to appear in outline.⁴⁹ Expressed almost entirely in the negative, those criteria remain somewhat vague. We can be sure, however, that for Marston, the critic bears a set of specific if unstated responsibilities that extend from matter to manner. The work of the critic should amount to something more than vile detraction and should accordingly aim at a higher style than that of Hall’s satirist. It should moreover produce something more lasting and substantial than detraction, which, like “fuming waves” produces “naught but white foam” (17-18). It is the function of criticism to promote poetic production by cultivating the “fairest blooms” (160) of aspiring poets, which Hall blasts with malevolence, and by fostering a fruitful, familial relationship between poet, critic, and reader: “Let’s not malign our kin” (169). “Reactio” demonstrates by example that the critic can fulfill these obligations without forgoing wit or raillery by railing wittily against destructive modes of criticism with an eye to correction.

Marston demonstrates this method a second time in the opening poem of *The Scourge of Villanie* (1598), “To Detraction I present my Poesy,” where he rails against “Envy’s abhorrèd child, Detraction” (3) and “critic’s rage” (11). Cutting a path that Guilpin would later tread, the speaker of the poem distinguishes between “Opinion” and “True judgment” and jettisons the former from his idea of proper criticism or “settled censure”:

A partial praise shall never elevate
My settled censure of my own esteem;
A canker’d verdict of malignant hate
Shall ne’er provoke me worse myself to deem.

⁴⁹ The fact that Marston invents many of the criticisms he attributes to Hall suggest that, to an extent, he is using him to make an independent point about criticism. See A. Davenport, “Some Notes on References to Joseph Hall in Marston’s Satires,” *The Review of English Studies*, 9.34 (April 1933), 192-6.

Spite of Despite and rancour's villainy,
I am myself, so is my poesy.

(19-24)

Marston thus enlarges his disapproval of the singularity that informs the “canker'd verdict” of the detractor to include those equally “partial” opinions that happen to fall in his favor. He sets “settled censure” over against both, emphasizing its fidelity to a criterion of judgment that is at once more dignified and venerable than “the dungy muddy scum / Of abject thoughts” (15-16), more resolved than mere “Opinion,” and yet, in its metaphysical essence, slightly more difficult to identify and articulate than either:

Know that the Genius, which attendeth on
And guides my powers intellectual,
Holds in all vile repute Detraction;
My soul an essence metaphysical,
That in the basest sort scorns critics' rage
Because he knows his sacred parentage.

(7-12)

Despite the place of priority Marston grants it in this poem, the idea of “True judgment” remains less clear than the idea with which he attempts to cast it in relief. Apophatic expressions of something other than vile detraction, a form and principle of critical judgment that renders detraction “toothless” (“Reactio” 166), fail to bring that concept fully into the light. If we are left to wonder at the metacritical principle that informs Marston's resolve, we can at least take stock in the fact that those apophatic expressions, here as in “Reactio,” evoke production through destruction, community through singularity, and charity through “malignant hate” (21). Together, the two poems point in the same direction, even if we cannot determine with any precision what lies in that direction.

Everard Guilpin brings the fight to the word *critic* itself. In the “Satyre Praeludium” of his *Skialethia* (1598), he presents the critical satirist as the long-awaited solution to the

enervating, hermaphroditic (2) excesses of English poetry. Surveying the abused kinds from elegy to heroic poem, he observes that

The Satyre onely and Epigramatist...
Keepe diet from this surfet of excesse....
The bitter censures of their Critticke spleenes,
Are Antidotes to pestilentiall sinnes....
These critique wits which nettle vanitie,
Are better farre then foode to foppery

(65-100)

Guilpin thus begins his collection of verse satires with a strong endorsement of the literary critical value of satire that promises to redeem the critic, both in name and person, by foregrounding his capacity to cure sin, punish vanity, and reform English poetry. Curiously enough, in the twenty-fourth epigram of *Skiaethia*, we see that spleen reflexively directed at satire itself through the figure of Fuscus, who likely represents Thomas Nashe.⁵⁰ In the brief narrative of the epigram, Nashe-Fuscus becomes so enamored of his rough, scolding muse – so taken, in other words, with the beauty of detraction – that he “prostitutes” it to every comer (10). Opposing his own muse to that of Nashe, Guilpin sanctions satire by strictly regulating its deployment and presenting its shaggiest features as generically decorous.⁵¹ Much like a gun (his metaphor; see below), satire becomes a contributor to, rather than a bulwark against, disorder when used indiscriminately.

Guilpin’s metacritical resolve, however, quickly wanes. *Skiaethia* concludes with a satire that filters the metacritical concerns of the collection through a Stoic dialectic of reason and opinion. Widely divergent opinions on the virtues of English poets from Chaucer to Spenser lead the philosophical speaker of that poem to dismiss literary judgment out of hand along with the rest of “Opinion ... *the hisse of Geese, the peoples noyse*” (51-116). The

⁵⁰ See Guilpin, *Skiaethia*, pp. 114-5 n. 1.

⁵¹ See, for instance, epigram 70, “Conclusion to the Reader.”

same poet who had boldly presented the critic as a guide out of the dark wood of English poetry here sells off as slaves to Opinion “Players, Minstrels, silken Reuellers ... Brokers, Coblers, slaues, / Black-men, trap-makers, and such kind of knaues” (106, 161-2) – that is, those individuals who compose the “many headed” monster (163), those readers and theatergoers most in need of the critic’s precious antidote to pestilential sin. Turning, as he leaves us, from Aretino to Epictetus, Guilpin’s satirist abandons the critic, writing him out of the poetic economy entirely and rendering unto detraction his name and character:

...let’s be Stoicks, resolute, and spare not
To tell the proudest Criticke that we care not
For his wooden censure, nor to mittigate
The sharp tart veriuice of his snap-haunce hate
Would change a line, a word, no not a poynt
For his deepe mouthed scoffes, as soone disioynt
His grand-iest chaps as hurt our credites, who
Are carelesse of what he can say or do.

(“Satire VI,” 131-8)

His stance arrogant and scoffing, his judgment “wooden” or dense, his body all mouth and “chaps,” and his function that of an acid-spewing gun (“verjuice” being the bitter juice of unripe fruit, and “snap-haunce,” a kind of flint-lock), the critic appears here in the readily identifiable shape of the detractor. Like so many of his contemporaries and predecessors, the speaker of “Satire VI” paints this picture to set in motion the all but automatic process of identification and dismissal of the harshly consonantal “Criticke.” Whether overwhelmed by the sheer tenacity of the equation of the critic and the detractor or reformed by Justus Lipsius,⁵² the speaker reduces all of criticism to scoffing (168-78) or the worthless and unwelcome praise of idiots and pedants (179-84), dominant categories with which we have become familiar. The spleen of the critic, for which Guilpin had promised to secure a

⁵² Carroll addresses the clear influence of *De Constantia Libri Duo* upon “Satire VI” in Guilpin, *Skiaethia*, pp. 216-35, *passim*; esp. pp. 216-7.

position of moral and literary authority, is ultimately offered something else entirely: “a *Fico* for the *Criticke* spleene” (188). Guilpin’s failed attempt to redeem the critic speaks to the particular difficulty presented by that task at the end of the sixteenth century in England. And if it was difficult for Guilpin and other Elizabethan critics to break the link between detraction and criticism, between Momus, Zoilus, or Fuscus and their most optimistic visions of the modern English critic, how much more so must it have been for Fuscus himself.

IV. The Dog Whipper of Paul’s

Even more than *Pierce Penniless* (1592), his most popular work, and the anti-Martinist invective that would make him a hero to seventeenth-century defenders of the established church,⁵³ Thomas Nashe’s quarrel with Gabriel Harvey shaped the persona that came to subsume the man. In the wake of the quarrel, that persona – an unflappable young wit with a sharp bite and a knack for unraveling pedants and braggarts – reappeared on the London stage as Moth, the “tender juvenal” of *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (c. 1593-95), and on the university stage as Ingenioso, the disillusioned satirist of the *Parnassus Plays* (c. 1598-1602). “I, heer’s a fellow ... that carryed the deadly Stockado in his pen” (1.2.311-2; Leishman 245) observes Ingenioso of his recently deceased original. Mentioned by name along with Harvey in the Bishops’ Ban of 1599, and invoked posthumously in works such as Dekker’s *Newes from hell* (1606) as an English Aretino who “[made] the Doctor a flat dunce” (C2), Nashe embodied detraction at its most delicious and dangerous for his contemporaries as for us. More than any other figure of his era, he found himself caught between the oppositional forces outlined in this chapter: the beauty of detraction, its well-documented moral and political liabilities,

⁵³ See Nashe, pp. 5.45-8.

and the nearly insurmountable ideological structure equating the critic with the detractor. For if his gift was for raillery, his ambition was for criticism.

His identity as a critic, that merciless mock commentator who dismembers Harvey's works line by line in *Strange News* (1593) and *Have with You to Saffron-Walden* (1596), would appear simply to be a factor of this governing persona. It seems even to have sprouted from the same soil, for at the root of the Harvey-Nashe quarrel we find a debate over critical authority and proper critical practice.⁵⁴ In 1590, Richard Harvey, younger brother to Gabriel, appended to his theological discourse *The Lamb of God* an epistle in which he attacks Martin Marprelate on the basis of style in religious and classical rhetorical terms. Christian writers, he insists, should fashion themselves not after wolves, foxes, or dogs – nor after Scoggin or Tarleton – but only after “the most gentle and most noble nature of the sweete Lamb ... [who] is no scoffer, nor rayler” (a[1]^v). Moreover, “schollers knowe and should practise the rules of *decorum*,” treating grave matters gravely and religious matters religiously (a[1]^v). Martin had clearly failed on both counts.

So too had a relatively unknown writer, “one *Thomas Nash* ... who taketh vppon him in ciuill learning, as *Martin* doth in religion, peremptorily censuring his betters at pleasure” (a2^v). Harvey refers here to Nashe's preface to Robert Greene's *Menaphon* (1589), his first publication since arriving in London from Cambridge in 1588. Lumping the young Nashe in with the “piperly makeplay[s]” of London (a3^v), Harvey charges him with the impudence, indecency, and indecorum of Martin for having so brazenly assumed the mantle of the critic in his preface and for daring to judge such luminaries as More, Ascham, and “my brother Doctor *Harvey*” (a2^v). The comparison must have stung doubly for being as stylistically apt

⁵⁴ My account of the quarrel draws upon those of McKerrow, Hibbard, Nicholl, and Stern. See Nashe, pp. 5.65-100; Hibbard, pp. 180-232; and Nicholl, *passim*. On Richard Harvey's instigation of the quarrel in *The Lamb of God*, see Nashe, p. 5.76; Hibbard, pp. 182-3; and Nicholl, p. 75.

as it was ideologically off-base, for Martin crucially served Nashe both as a model for and a target of raillery.⁵⁵ Nashe was among those writers tapped to answer Martin in his own vein and is generally considered to be the author of the anonymous anti-Martinist pamphlet *An Almond for a Parrat* (1589).

By Nashe's own account, Richard Harvey's metacritical snub was the opening salvo of the great paper war that followed. "Heere beginneth the fray" (1.262),⁵⁶ he remarks of the event in *Strange News*, and he repeats the claim in *Pierce Penniless* and *Have with You*, ever eager to remind the Harveys and his other readers that he occupies a position of defense in the debate (1.195-97, 3.130). Having been publicly maligned as a writer and a critic, what could he do but "draw vppon him with my penne, and defende my selfe with it and a paper buckler as well as I might?" (1.262). Nashe had not sought a fight with the Harveys. In fact, as he hastens to point out, the initial "censure" of Gabriel that had so offended Richard amounted to unqualified praise (3.130). But with the fight upon him, Nashe made certain to end it. If indeed his critical identity is a factor of his popular persona – is, like that persona, a product of the quarrel – then we find in Nashe yet another case of an early modern English critic forced into the role.

Yet there is more to the story and more to Nashe. The embattled detractor, with his paper buckler, proves as inadequate to the complexity of Nashe's critical identity as Moth does to the author of *The Terrors of the Night* (1594) and *Christs Teares* (1594). It was not the Harveys who forced Nashe into the role of the critic; his critical career both antedates and transcends their quarrel. Rather, as the pre-quarrel *Anatomy of Absurdity* (1589) makes clear, it was the specific circumstances of a burgeoning literary market in England. Because

⁵⁵ See Crewe, pp. 34-5; Hibbard, pp. 25-6, 28; Nicholl, p. 77; and Summersgill, Travis, "The Influence of the Marprelate Controversy upon the Style of Thomas Nash," *SP* 48.2 (1951): 145-60.

⁵⁶ All citations of Nashe's works refer to the McKerrow edition.

common balladeers and second-rate sonneteers have obtained “the name of our English poets,” thus disgracing not only themselves but England and poetry on the whole, Nashe feels he “cannot but turne them out of their counterfet liuerie, and brand them in the foreheade, that all men may know their falshood” (1.24). Similarly, the arguments of anti-intellectual reformists like Phillip Stubbes, author of the Puritan philippic *The Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), must be opposed not on principle but rather because their ideas have “crept into credit” (1.22). Like Stephen Gosson, whose criticism constitutes a common-experiential response to the advent of public theater (and other abuses) in London rather than a theoretical response to or rehearsing of the warhorses of classical criticism, Nashe as a critic responds more forcefully to experience than ideas.

This makes him particularly interested in the material conditions surrounding literary production and in the social effects of what he consistently describes as a diseased literary market. In the *Anatomy of Absurdity*, the work that Nashe likely intended to serve as his literary debut before being offered the preface to *Menaphon*,⁵⁷ he begins by noting a certain saturation in the English literary market: “It fareth nowe a daies with vnlearned Idiots as it doth with she Asses, who bring foorth all their life long; euen so these brainlesse Bussards, are euery quarter bigge wyth one Pamphlet or other” (1.9). Nashe thus begins his writing career by remarking upon a need for quality and population control in the literary market and addressing that need with critical mediation. He proposes to protect the health and well-being of England’s readers by branding “Authors of the absurder sort ... with a *Nigrum theta* [the proverbial “black mark” placed upon the doors of plague-ridden houses], that each one at the first sight may eschew it as infectious” (1.9).

⁵⁷ Nashe left Cambridge for London in 1588. Although the *Anatomy* was written earlier – it is the earliest of his works that we possess – the preface to Greene’s *Menaphon* beat it to press by a few months. See Hibbard, p. 10; Nashe, p. 5.15; and Nicholl, pp. 37-8.

Beyond providing an impetus for his critical career in the *Anatomy*, the invocation of these market conditions serves as a familiar refrain thereafter. Three years later, in *Pierce Penniless* (1592), little has changed. “Not a base Inck-dropper,” Nashe reports, “... but nailes his asses eares on euerie post” (1.240). He offers a striking portrait of the physically hazardous atmosphere in St. Paul’s Churchyard, where peddling poets grab passers-by “by the sleeue” and pull them into their book stalls, which are full of nothing “but purgations and vomits wrapt vppe in wast paper” (1.239). His sense of the civic threat posed by literary waste finds expression once again in terms of epidemic disease, as he warns booksellers not to vend “any such goose gyblets or stinking garbadge, as the Iygs of newsmongers” (1.239) lest the foulness of such wares provoke an outbreak of plague. Half joking, he recommends that the “dog whipper in *Paules*” extend his jurisdiction to the Churchyard and disperse these abusive poets and pamphleteers to prevent sickness among church-goers (1.239). The half of this proposal that isn’t a joke is a half-baked metacritical argument – a projected image of the critic as a dog whipper who protects both the sanctity of the church and the physical integrity of its congregation from contamination and attack.

Richard Harvey’s metacritical censure of Thomas Nashe in *The Lamb of God* thus addresses, and effectively interrupts, a critical career already in full swing. Though it came too late to make a critic of Nashe, it nevertheless manages to bring into focus some of the defining dilemmas of Nashe’s criticism. In the zoological terms of his title, Harvey had raised the question of the style appropriate to censure (which beast he himself evokes remains a question). In proposing that such censors as Martin learn how to dispute “rather *ad rem*, then *ad personam*” (a2^v), he had raised the question of the contextual limits of criticism. And in proclaiming Nashe, the new kid in town, “none of the meetest men” to judge such scholars as More, Cheke, Watson, Haddon, Ascham, and his brother Gabriel

(a2^v), Harvey had raised the question of the basis of critical authority. Each of these questions proves central to Nashe's critical career, and each draws him in opposite directions.

In *Pierce Penniless*, Nashe is ready with an answer for Harvey's snobbish impugning of his critical credentials, expressing through Ovid the democratic notion that "*Iuppiter ingeniis praebebat sua numina vatum, / seque celebrari quolibet ore sinit* [Jupiter presents his divinity to the mind of the poet, and permits himself to be praised by any mouth]" (1.197).⁵⁸ Yet in the *Anatomy*, he denies Phillip Stubbes the right to moral censure on social hierarchical grounds with snobbery worthy of Harvey, claiming that "To prescribe rules of life, belongeth not to the ruder sort" (1.21). Questions of context and style, as we shall see, are met with equal ambivalence. Indeed, the whole of Nashe's critical career might be read as a troubled, and perhaps ultimately a failed, attempt to plot out the contextual limits of criticism and to restyle the modern English critic. The trouble arose from the great difficulty of resolving those personal tensions that stood between Nashe and the critical coherence required to cure a diseased literary market, tensions arising from conflicting commitments to humanist learning⁵⁹ and what he calls "secular wit," to social conservatism and artistic innovation, and to detraction and more productive modes of criticism.

The surfeit of bad writers plaguing the English literary market leads Nashe to criticism by prompting him to postulate causes and propose solutions. Two causes of literary decay stand out clearly to his ever earth-bound "domestical eyes" (3.319): the decline of learning, both in terms of practice and reputation, and the rise of Puritanism. In the final decades of the sixteenth century, due both to a much bruited shortage of priests and to a

⁵⁸ From *Tristia* 4.4.

⁵⁹ On Nashe's humanist loyalties, see Kinney, *Poetics*, pp. 304-62.

trend of pragmatism which had garnered interest in Ramist logic and had provoked “contraction in euery manuarie action” and “abiection abbreuiations of Arts” (3.318), Nashe witnessed students being rushed to the pulpit at the expense of their education. Entire texts were, by his account, replaced with epitomes and “barren compendiums” (3.318), and educators strived “to make their pupills pulpit-men before they are reconciled to *Priscian*” (1.37), which is to say, before they had mastered Latin grammar, the first step of the elementary medieval trivium. Long before his debate with Harvey, as Arthur Kinney has shown, Nashe had come “to fear and despise the New Men epitomized by Gabriel Harvey – those Puritans and Ramists ... who threatened to bring down in one massive rubble all the humanist foundations so carefully built by Ascham, Cheke, and their disciples of the recent past” (*Poetics* 315).

The results of the “contraction” Nashe chronicles were disastrous. In terms of literature, it created a body of writers “lesse conceiuing than infants” who are too ignorant not to publish “their imperfectio[n]s” (3.319) and a body of readers who allow “euery grosse braind Idiot ... to come into print” (1.159). In terms of religion, it not only left parishioners in the care of incompetent pastors but also threatened the integrity of the established church: “This greene fruite, beeing gathered before it be ripe, is rotten before it be mellow, and infected with Scismes, before they haue learned to bridle their affections, affecting innouations as newfangled, and enterprising alterations whereby the Church is mangled” (1.37).⁶⁰ Those whom ignorance leads to split from the established church pay dividends back to ignorance with a breed of anti-intellectualism that condemns all science on the grounds that it “perceiues nothing in it diuine” (1.36). In the preface to Greene’s *Menaphon*, Nashe names those “reformatorie Churchmen, who account wit vanitie, and poetry impiety”

⁶⁰ Black notes that the charge of ignorance had been leveled back and forth between reformists and establishmentarians since the early 1580s. See Black, *Martin*, pp. lxix-lxx, lxxxiii.

as the “efficient [cause]” of the dearth of serious career poets in England (3.321). His etiology of the decline of learning makes it impossible to discuss the plague of St. Paul’s Churchyard separately from the plague of St. Paul’s itself. As with Gosson, Daniel, and Jonson, as we shall see in the next chapter, Nashe’s determination as a critic to engage with poetry *in esse* reveals to him a network of discursive relationships running between poetry, criticism, and other areas of English culture and makes the broadest possible implications of his critical judgments apparent. Despite the bold Aristotelian claim above, he generally acknowledges the decline of learning as an overdetermined problem. He posits different causes on different occasions and repeatedly expresses his bemusement with variations upon the phrase “I cannot tell how it comes to passe” (e.g., 1.259, 3.318). If Puritan moralizing has discouraged the truly learned from attempting “any continuat subiect of wit” (3.321), a new spirit of pragmatism has called the practical value of learning into question and left “a Scriuener better paid for an obligation, than a Scholler for the best Poeme he can make” (1.159). If a crisis of charity toward the learned has left scholars like Pierce Penniless with limited options, the she-asses of the press have eliminated yet one more: “It makes the learned sort to be silent, whe[n] as they see vnlearned sots so insolent” (1.24).

No mere pretext to raillery, the decline of learning was for Nashe a cause for genuine lamentation. Reflecting on the glory that was Sidney, whose virtue, wit, and learning enabled him to “giue euery Vertue his encouragement, euery Art his due, euery writer his desert,” he muses that “ther is not that strict obseruation of honour, which hath beene heeretofore” (1.159). “*Quantum mutatus ab illo*” (1.25), he proclaims with Virgil, beholding the mess that doggerel poets have made of English poetry. How far English letters had fallen from the “tragicommodity of loue performed by starlight” that Nashe admired in *Astrophil and Stella* (3.329). In addition to his consistently brutal treatment of the reformists, and their affection

for innovation, sentiments like this one sound a note of conservatism, a kind of Elizabethan nostalgia *avant la lettre*. That note resonates throughout Nashe's criticism, but it is consistently countervailed by a commitment to artistic innovation that leads him, for instance, to contrast the pilfered sermons of "dul-headed Diuines" with the demand for novelty imposed upon men in print like himself: "Newe Herrings, new, wee must crye, euery time wee make our selues publique, or else we shall bee christened with a hundred newe titles of Idiotisme" (1.192).

Not surprisingly, humanist learning emerges as a distinguishing feature of the Nashean critic. Whereas for the poet learning contributes to a certain fictive obscurity that valuably conceals and protects the noumenal kernel of moral poetry (1.26), for the critic it enables perspicacity and discerning judgment. The learned critic calls Proteus Proteus, whatever his guise (1.5-6); can tell an empty egg from a full one; and can see through (or rather hear past) a booming drum to the emptiness within (i.e., can tell true *copia* from mere fustian, 1.9-10). As with so much in Nashe, we often find this capacity expressed in the negative. He implicitly opposes himself to the critic of "vndiscerning iudgment, [who] makes drosse as valuable as gold, and losse as welcome as gaine" and who perceives no difference between a coarse ballad and "the best Poeme that euer *Tasso* eternisht" (1.314). He expresses pity for those "poore latinlesse Authors ... [who] no sooner spy a new Ballad, and his name to it that compilde it: but they put him in for one of the learned men of our time" (1.195). And he attributes the poor reputation of the arts in England to those "men of meaner iudgment" who "[estimate] Artes by the insolence of Idiots ... [censuring] the dignitie of Poetry by *Cherillus* paultry paines, the maiestie of Rethorick by the rudenesse of a stutting *Hortensius*, [and] the subiltie of Logique by the rayling of *Ramus*" (1.44-5). Discerning judgment, and an accurate assessment of the value of the arts, demands knowledge of the

best that has been thought and said. The proper critic censures the dignity of poetry not by Cherillus, that legendary hack of the ancient world, but by Homer. Yet Nashe goes even further. He recommends that “Gentlemen and riper iudgements” whose senses have been dulled by being “surfeited vnawares with the sweet society of eloquence” stimulate and refresh their critical judgment by exposing themselves to “our Gothamists barbarisme” and “that *sublime dicendi genus*, which walkes abroad for wast paper in each serving-mans pocket” (1.313-4). It is a course of critical training which Nashe recommends, however facetiously, from experience.

This gesture of tempering or enriching humanist learning with that strain of London savvy that Nashe elsewhere calls “secular wit” traces the fault line of one of the defining tensions of Nashe’s criticism. Despite his commitment to learning,⁶¹ and the great pride he takes in the education he received at St. John’s, he consistently guards against the possibility that learning in excess might lead to pedantry, doddiness, or alienation by railing against pedantry, championing artistic innovation, and “insisting in the experience of our time” (1.215). In the *Anatomy*, Nashe expresses pity for those critics “who ... excruciate themselves about impertinent questions, as about *Homers* Country, parentage, and sepulcher, whether *Homer* or *Hesiodus* were older, whether *Achilles* or *Patroclus* more ancient, in what apparrell *Anacharsis* the *Scithian* slept, whether *Lucan* is to be reckoned amongst the Poets or the Historiographers, in what Moneth in the yere *Virgill* died” (1.46-7). A few years later, the quarrel with Harvey would allow Nashe, among others, to put a name to this face and to make his own opposition to it even more pronounced.

It is telling that in addition to pedantry, Nashe charges Harvey simply with being old-fashioned (3.54). The novelty of his own style was a point of pride for Nashe, and he

⁶¹ For a concise account of Nashe’s “wide if indiscriminate reading,” see Kinney, *Poetics*, p. 316. See also Nashe, pp. 5.110-36.

bristles when Harvey challenges it: “This will I proudly boast ... that the vaine which I haue ... is of my owne begetting, and calls no man father in England but my selfe, neyther *Euphues*, nor *Tarlton*, nor *Greene*” (1.319). His commitment to artistic innovation so tempers his commitment to humanist learning that he dismisses the Horatian model of slow and patient composition for an innovative model of extemporal wit. True wit lives in the moment and reeks not of lamp oil but of city streets:

Let other men (as they please) praise the Mountaine that in seauen yeares bringeth forth a Mouse, or the Italianate penne that, of a packet of pilfries, affords the presse a pamphlet or two in an age, and then in disguised array vaunts *Ouids* and *Plutarchs* plumes as theyr owne; but giue me the man whose extemporall veine in any humour will excell our greatest Art-maisters deliberate thoughts; whose inuentions, quicker then his eye, will challenge the prowdest Rhetoritian to the contention of like perfection with like expedition.

What is he among Students so simple, that cannot bring foorth (*tandem aliquando*) some or other thing singular, sleeping betwixt euery sentence? Oft haue I obserued what I now set downe: a secular wit that hath liued all dayes of his life by What doe you lacke? to be more iudiciall in matters of conceit then our quadrant crepundios, that spit *ergo* in the mouth of euery one they meete.

(3.312-4)

To the classically trained rhetorician, Nashe opposes the new professional writer of the English press. Whereas university curricula has made the one uniform and uniformly trifling (“quadrant” < L. *quadrare*, to make square; “crepundio” < L. *crepundium*, rattle, toy, trifle), the English literary market, which ever demands new herrings, has forced the other to be quick (“extemporal”) and flexible (“in any humour”). Whereas courtly ambition has mired the one in the outmoded Italianate tastes of the court, the fluctuating demands of that largely urban market, signaled here by the cry of the street vendor (“What doe you lacke?”), have provided the secular wits of the wider English world (“secular” < L. *seculum*, world) with an education in the vagaries of taste. Of course, it is no surprise that Nashe’s celebration of the virtues of such writers as Robert Greene – innovativeness, singularity, flexibility, and quickness of wit

– reflect back upon his own writing. The surprise is that the same abbreviation, contraction, and spirit of pragmatism that he elsewhere presents as a threat to learning here provides him with a set of critical criteria uniquely attuned to a rapidly urbanizing England.

Applied to the practice of criticism, those criteria lead Nashe to emphasize the civic benefit of the authoritative judgment of literary works, an emphasis at odds with the improvidence, impracticality, or deliberate meaninglessness often attributed to Nashe's works.⁶² He proposes a "publique Edict" whereby bad poets would be prohibited from provoking the detestation of England's heroes through their praise of them (1.24). He suggests that with a critic in place to remind lewd English poets of the exile of Ovid, "the Presse should be farre better employed ... Englishmen shoulde not be halfe so much Italianted as they are ... loue woulde obtaine the name of lust, and vice no longer maske vnder the visard of vertue" (1.10). In *Pierce Pennilesse*, he defends popular theater as a valuable purgative for mutinous vapors, accommodating drama to the interests of the City of London and the monarchy. Here again, Nashe attempts to reconcile his nostalgic brand of social conservatism with a keen interest in business and social life in contemporary London; in other words, he curbs his tendency to look back by indulging his desire to look around. His moral defense of popular theater, which hinges rather predictably upon the punishment of vice and the exaltation of virtue, threatens to dissolve into a commonplace. But he makes it new by insisting in the experience of his own time and supporting his argument with reference to the English histories of Shakespeare. He balances his admiration for the bygone heroes of English history – Talbot and Henry the Fifth – with hope for what the dramatic resurrection of those heroes might do for modern England (1.212). The difficulty of maintaining the careful balance he pursues becomes apparent in those moments when he

⁶² See, for instance, Hutson, pp. 11, 122-3.

loses it. His desire to defend modern English drama is, for instance, sometimes indistinct from his desire to maintain established structures of order for their own sake. If Shakespeare's Talbot fails to make many Talbots, he suggests, at very least such entertainments keep idle hands occupied and stave off sedition and rebellion (1.211).

In the same passage, as Nashe lays into the opponents of the English stage, his own self-perceived assets as a critic come through. He attacks those "shallow-braind censurers" as being too politically obtuse ("not the deepest serchers into the secrets of government") to see the civic benefits of popular drama and too out of touch with the realities of urban life to see that for the idle courtiers, law students, and soldiers who patronize the public theaters, the choice is not between seeing a play and not seeing a play but between seeing a play and seeing a whore (1.212). He similarly attacks those "Vinterns, Alewiues, and Victuallers" who denounce plays in hopes of winning the business of the theaters for themselves not so much for their avarice and hypocrisy as for their bad judgment. For if there were no plays, Nashe argues, the would-be groundling would either visit a brothel or sit in his room "deuising vpon felonie or treason, and howe he may best exalt himselfe by mischiefe" (1.214). Just as noteworthy as these critical virtues themselves – civic pragmatism, political keenness, and the perspicuity to see through interested arguments – is the satirical mode of attack in which they find expression. They emerge not from praise but from dispraise, not directly but through apophasis. Just as Nashe attempts to balance humanist learning with secular wit and social conservatism with aesthetic progressivism, so too fashioning a lasting role for the English critic requires him to reconcile the beauty and liabilities of detraction.

Lest we mistake him as an enemy to poetry, to borrow his own phrase (1.125), it bears noting that Nashe is a vocal champion of English literature. What's more, when operating in the mode of praise, he proves an agile and acute critic. His celebration of

Astrophil and Stella in the preface to the unauthorized 1591 edition of that work remains one of the most concisely insightful and elegant readings of the poem in print (3.329-33). In *Pierce Penniless*, he faults English poets for being too stingy with their praise, urging them to “boast in large impressions what worthy men (aboue all Nations) *England* affoord” (1.215). He is ever ready with a word of praise for Chaucer, Sidney, Spenser, and the great English humanists.

More often than not, however, his criticism takes the form not of praise but of detraction. Proving the point requires little in the way of argumentation, for Nashe himself repeatedly lays bare a critical methodology predicated upon reward and punishment, placing an excessive emphasis upon the latter. In the preface to Greene’s *Menaphon*, his first published work, he vows to “persecute those idiots and their heires vnto the third generation, that haue made Art bankerout of her ornaments, and sent Poetry a begging vp and downe the Countrey” (3.324). In *Pierce Penniless*, he boasts of a “thankfull minde aboue others” that will enable him to honor any generous patron before elaborating the “contrary side” with a great deal more gusto and invention:

if I bee euill intreated ... let him looke that I will raile on him soundly: not for an houre a day, whiles the iniury is fresh in my memory, but in some elaborate, polished Poem, which I will leaue to the world when I am dead, to be a liuing Image to all ages, of his beggerly parsimony and ignoble illiberalitie: and let him not (whatsoeuer he be) measure the weight of my words by this booke, where I write *Quic quid in buccam venerit*, as fast as my hand can trot; but I haue tearmes (if I be vext) laid in steepe in *Aquafortis*, & Gunpowder, that shall rattle through the Skyes and make an Earthquake in a Pesants eares.

(1.195)

He seems almost to invite the offense. Whereas the thought of liberality leads him to make rather unspecific promises about encomia, the thought of illiberality spawns this rich vision

of an “elaborate, polished Poem” of detraction that will outlive both Nashe and its subject. His is a muse of “*Aqua fortis* & Gunpowder.”

This too Nashe readily acknowledges. He regularly expresses confidence in his abilities as a detractor, critical or otherwise, and indulges his strong taste for that mode. After redressing the wrong done him by Richard Harvey in *Pierce Penniless*, he turns from his opponent to his audience: “*Redeo ad vos, mei Auditores*, haue I not an indifferent pritty vayne in Spurgalling an Asse? if you knew how extemporall it were at this instant, and with what hast it is writ, you would say so” (1.199). Here and elsewhere Nashe presents detraction as an opportunity to demonstrate his extemporal wit (1.199), a kind of twelve-bar blues to test and showcase the skill of the improvisatory artist. He boasts that he will take on all comers *extempore* any time – he’ll even give them the chance to write out their quips ahead of time (3.29-30). Later, with regard to Gabriel Harvey, Nashe will claim that he writes against him not because he hates him but to prove “*that I am able to answere him*” (3.19). In *Have with You*, when Senior Importuno, one of the interlocutors of the dialogue, begins to make an observation about the text of *Pierces Supererogation*, Nashe, or *Piers Pennilesse Respondent*, interrupts him: “Hand off, there is none but I will haue the vnclasping of that, because I can doo it nimblest” (3.117). “Saint Fame for mee, and thus I runne vpon him” (1.263), Nashe writes at the outset of *Strange News*, early on in the debate. Beyond acknowledging his own skill in detraction, Nashe saw in it, at least initially, an opportunity for fame and livelihood, thus betraying something of that “vile ambition” attributed to him by Harvey.

He rails, as we have seen, against Puritans and other anti-intellectuals of “senceless stoicall austeritie” (1.27). He rails against the common balladeers and second-rate sonneteers of Paul’s Churchyard. He attacks, among others, Thomas Kyd for draining Seneca dry (3.315-6); Richard Stanyhurst for his execrable translation of the *Aeneid* (3.319-20); Marlowe

– or perhaps just his imitators – for his bombastic blank verse (3.311); and Barnabe Barnes for his “*stink-a-pisse*” rhymes (3.103) and his codpiece “as big as a *Bolognian* sawcedge” (3.109). He takes a metacritical swing at those “deep read Schoolemen or Grammarians, who ... take vpon them to be the ironically Censors of all, when God and Poetrie doth know they are the simplest of all” (3.312).

Above all, of course, he rails against the Harveys, quite literally detracting from their works by drawing upon them textually in the form of a mock commentary. At its most critically coherent, this detraction constitutes an apophatic expression of those criteria that inform Nashe’s idea of proper critical practice. Detraction permits Nashe in such instances to continue to build up a critical ideal even as he tears down the Harveys, thus joining Hall, Marston, and Guilpin in the pursuit of a productive mode of detraction. His caricature of Harvey as “the vnflattered picture of Pedantisme” (3.42) derives from the opposition to the abuse of learning expressed in the *Anatomy*. By suggesting that Harvey lacks the ear to distinguish between himself, Tarleton (1.304), and Greene (1.319-20), he exposes the doctor’s failure to temper humanist learning with secular wit by Nashe’s metacritical formula. His amusement at the rumor of Harvey having to pay for the printing of his own works derives from the appreciation, gleaned by his own secular wit, of the economic realities of the English literary market: “The Printers and Stationers vse him as he wer the *Homer* of this age, for they say vnto him, *Si nihil attuleris, ibis, Homere, foras; Haruey*, if ye bring no mony in your purse, ye get no books printed here” (3.71). And his criticism of Harvey’s *Aedes Valdinenses* owes less to personal malice than it does to aesthetic progressivism: “The bungierliest vearses they were that euer were scande, beeing most of them hought and cut off by the knees out of *Virgill* and other Authors” (3.78). He accuses Harvey of critical imprecision, and his own investment in that negatively expressed criterion determines, in

part, the line-by-line method of his responses to Harvey (1.329, 3.132). If he occasionally misrepresents Harvey's text, he does so within a critical framework that nevertheless gives the impression of textual accuracy: "*They are his owne wordes, hee cannot goe from them*" (1.247). Antecedent, coherent, and more or less constant critical values govern the detraction of such passages.

Elsewhere, however, Nashe forgoes critical coherence and plays directly into the hands of Momus and Zoilus. Depending upon our perspective, detraction reaches either its nadir or its zenith in *Have with You to Saffron Walden*, which not only extends the context of criticism to the personal but centers it there. Nashe makes fun of Harvey's skin and complexion (3.93), pitilessly and at length recounts a fallacious and absurd story in which Harvey is imprisoned for debt (3.96-101), and accuses him, among other things, of being lustful and narcissistic (3.68). Nashe claims that the intellectual promise that Philip Sidney had once perceived in Harvey, and of which Harvey often boasted, was quickly overshadowed by the pride revealed "in [Harvey's] lookes, his gait, his gestures, and speeches" (3.116). Manners speak truth in *Have with You*. Its guiding critical premise is that Harvey's life and character are more significant and more damning than his works: "one true point [of his life] well set downe, wil more excruciate & commacerate him, than knocking him about the eares with his own stile in a hundred sheetes of paper" (3.29). Its best known feature, a crude engraving of Harvey en route to the privy, according to Nashe's caption, accurately reflects the spirit of the whole. It is criticism become mockery. For all of its wit and hilarity, it indulges detraction in its purest and most predictable form by judging the man rather than the matter and, like Martin Marprelate, purchasing appeal at the expense of persuasion.

If in slipping between the critic and the detractor, Nashe found himself a victim of what we might call the volatility of detraction, he could not have been terribly surprised. For he himself acknowledges this volatility by alternatively describing his criticism in productive and destructive terms. Here he compares it to surgery (3.324), the lancing of an ulcer (1.131), or, somewhat ambivalently, to a curative ink shot into the diseased eyes of Richard Harvey (1.262). And there he presents it as lightning and thunder (3.40), a hurricane (3.20), or a plague (1.261). His awareness of the potential for slippage leads him consistently to qualify his often barbed criticism and to defend himself from being equated with and reduced to the detractor. Nashe recognized as well as Harvey the type evoked by his gunpowder muse. Still, it seemed to him that to call “a foppe a foppe” or to cudgel a snarling dog was hardly detraction (3.119). Like Guilpin and others, he defends himself with a plea of generic decorum (1.324). As we have seen, he never missed an opportunity to point out that he did not instigate the quarrel with the Harveys. The point is important to Nashe because it renders detraction into self-defense: “haue I not cause to bestirre me?” (1.269). Harvey aside, he insists that he never “so much as in thought detracted from *Du Bartas*, *Buchanan*, or anie generall allowed moderne Writer” (3.130).

Hardly blind to the liabilities of detraction, Nashe often rails against raillery itself. With regard to Stubbes and those other anatomists of abuses so “forward in detracting” (1.36), he remarks that “painting foorth other mens imperfections” doesn’t make the painter any holier (1.20), gesturing toward the self-interested will to distraction. Elsewhere he laments the current fashion of “dogged detracting” decried by Lodge, Hall, Dekker, and others and the greediness with which readers snatch up “the most poysonous *Pasquil* any durty mouthed *Martin* or *Momus* euer composed” (1.315). He attacks Harvey at length for detracting from the dead, namely Robert Greene and Andrew Perne, and casts in his face the

indiscretion of Momus, likening him to a dog that will “bite and gnarle at anie bone or stone that is neere him” (3.87-8). Like Harvey, he suggests that detraction is cowardly and lazy – a cheap gambit for fame (1.43-4). All of this, added to his commitment to extemporal wit and artistic innovation, leaves him utterly incensed at the imputation that his “onely Muse is contention” (1.259), that all his ink is gall (3.19), that he “can do nothing but raile” (1.320). Taking in hand a well-worn instrument, he dismisses the accusation as the judgment of “detracter[s]” (1.259) and “foule-mouthd backbiters” (1.320). “I haue written in all sorts of humors priuately,” he proudly declares, “...more than any yoong man of my age in England” (1.320).

We can begin to hear in this declaration what Nashe himself began to feel as the quarrel with Harvey unfolded: in a word, that he had had a reputation foisted upon him that he neither wanted nor deserved. He regrets what the quarrel has done to his style: “Ere I was chained to [Harvey] thus by the necke, I was as light as the Poet *Accius*, who was so lowe and so slender that hee was faine to put lead into his shooes for feare the winde should blowe him into another Countrie” (1.322). And he begins to question from a new and more secularly wise perspective the beauty of detraction, that beauty which for so many readers was indistinguishable from Nashe’s own. In a long appraisal of satire in *Strange News*, he qualifies his admiration of Horace, Persius, and Juvenal, wishing that they had conceded more to the “pleasure” of the reader by tempering the harsh Phrygian with the lighter Dorian mode. Turning this criterion of pleasure against Harvey, he sounds less like the detractor in love with his own knack for “Spurgalling an Asse” than a writer intent on providing his reader with some lasting benefit: “Those that catch Leopards set cups of wine before them; those that will winne liking and grace of the readers must set before them

continually that which shall cheare them and reuiue them” (1.322). Harvey’s *Pierces Supererogation* would draw Nashe back into the fray, but not without regret.

What ultimately tips the balance between Nashe’s taste and talent for detraction and his growing sense of its limitations is the hard-won knowledge that it is unprofitable. Writing in *Have with You*, in what was to be the final volley of the great paper war, he confesses that he has gained nothing by detraction: “*there is not one pint of wine more than the iust Bill of costs and charges in setting forth, to be got by anie of these bitter-sauced Inuectiues*” (3.18). Acknowledging that the quarrel has become a trifling public entertainment, a “Cock-fight,” he vows to end it, with change:

But this Cock-fight once past, I vow to turne a new leafe ... resolving to take vp for the Word or *Motto* of my patience, *Perdere posse sat est*, it is enough that it is in my power to call a Sessions and trusse him vp when I list ... so euer after I will care for no conquest or victorie which carries not with it a present rich possibilitie of raying my decayed fortunes, and Cauallier flourishing with a feather in my cappe (hey gallanta) in the face of enuie and generall Worlds opinion.

(3.30)

Nashe thus takes his leave of detraction, taking comfort in the knowledge that he could, if he so chose, dispatch Harvey or any other comer anytime, anywhere. The vile ambition that once saw in detraction the face of Saint Fame here speaks to the contrary from experience. Turning over a new leaf, Nashe sets his sights on repairing his poverty and his infamy – and upon smiling in the faces of his enemies once he has. The particular pathos of the passage derives from what Nashe could not possibly have known in 1596. Unaware that he would be forced to flee London in 1597, in the wake of the controversy surrounding *The Isle of Dogs*;⁶³ unaware that his works would be called in and burned in 1599 by the church he had so capably served in the Marprelate controversy; unaware that he was already halfway

⁶³ See Hibbard, pp. 234-6; Nashe, pp. 5.29-33; and Nicholl, pp. 242-56.

through the final decade of his life and that there would not be time enough to make the repairs he proposes here; and, finally, unaware of the extent to which the Thomas Nashe of the “generall Worlds opinion” had already become the real Thomas Nashe, he turns his course to fresh woods and pastures new and to a critical ideal that we can only imagine by piecing together what might have been its constituent parts.

Greater pathos still derives from the fact that the pragmatic epiphany that leads Nashe away from detraction leads him right back to Zoilus. Thomas Cooper, Edward Phillips, and others emphasize an economic facet to the legend of Zoilus that anticipates the nature of Nashe’s recantation. Zoilus expected to be rewarded for his criticism of Homer by Ptolemy, but his hopes were disappointed. He ultimately went hungry and, forced to beg at the feet of the Pharaoh, was rebuked: “Naie (saith Ptolome) Homer feedeth and refresheth many. Wherefore thou, that arte better then Homer, maiest well finde thy self without reliefe of other.”⁶⁴ The poet produces and nourishes; the detractor destroys and starves.

Beyond relearning this lesson in a new historical context, what Nashe and the early modern discourse on detraction contribute to the history of the idea of the critic is to reveal the crucial importance of the question of style in literary criticism. For an era steeped in rhetoric, it may seem a moot point; the Aristotelian concept of ethos was undoubtedly familiar to Nashe, “a professed *Peripatician*” (1.27) in more ways than one. Outside the context of criticism, the issue of style has been addressed at length in Nashe scholarship and has earned him a lasting if contested reputation as a writer of what C. S. Lewis termed “pure” literature, literature whose style is its content (416). Complicating that reputation, Jonathan Crewe has read Nashe as “a significant anatomist of Elizabethan literary performance” (101) whose writings and career were shaped by a self-conscious and often

⁶⁴ “Zoilus” in Thomas Cooper, *Thesaurus linguae Romanae & Britannicae* (London: 1578).

agonized attempt to engage the authorial dilemmas posed by the opposition, going back to Plato, of “rhetoric” to truth. As a critic, Nashe comes to recognize and resent the impingement of ethos upon argument by means of a process beyond his control. His reputation as a pure stylist must be qualified by his own hostility to the tendentious capacity of style to corrupt the claims of the critic by functioning, in his case, as a logical sign for the detractor. His awareness of this capacity extends beyond his case to include that of Harvey and the pedant: “What a mischiefe does [Harvey] taking anie mans name in his vlcerous mouth? that, being so festred and racnkled with barbarisme, is able to rust and canker it, were it neuer so replendent” (3.49). A common corruption afflicts and thus reunites the archetypal pair with which this chapter began.

In the pamphlet that, by Nashe’s account, sparked the great paper war, Richard Harvey disputes the power of satire to persuade or reform, remarking that “*Rabelays* is no good reformer of Churches and States” (a[1]r). If Martin Marprelate had stirred up among the Elizabethans a new appetite for satire, he had also, in failing to advance his cause, proven Harvey’s point. The medium became the message, and Martin’s larger argument was lost on his readers. Similarly, detraction, if it obtains any meaning at all, never means what the detractor means it to. Rather, it means his cowardice or his lack of talent. John Andrewes and others were content to receive it as its logical inverse, that is, as a form of praise. The reputation of the detractor precedes him and inevitably transcends and masks over the specific content of his claims.

It is a point suitably illustrated by a final anecdote. In the summer of 1593, with their quarrel still in its early stages, Harvey and Nashe, either of their own volition or through the importuning of friends, sought to be reconciled.⁶⁵ Progress in that direction

⁶⁵ See Nicholl, pp. 172-3.

may have encouraged Nashe to pen the straight-faced *mea culpa* included in the preface to the first edition of *Christs Tears*: “vnfainedly I entreate of the whole worlde, from my penne his worths may receive no impeachment” (2.12). It was a generous and a humble gesture. Under different circumstances, it might have ended the quarrel before Harvey had published *Pierces Supererogation* and *A New Letter*, and before Nashe had even written *Have with You*. It might thus have altered the fortunes and careers of both men for the better.

But Harvey didn’t buy it.

PART III: CRITICAL CONNECTIONS

Among diverse opinions of an Art, and most of them contrary in themselves, it is hard to make election; and therefore, though a man cannot invent new things after so many, he may doe a welcome worke yet to helpe posterity to judge rightly of the old.

- Ben Jonson, in the *Discoveries*¹

¹ ll. 1762-7. All citations of the *Discoveries* refer to line numbers in the Herford and Simpson edition.

CHAPTER FIVE: JONSON, DECAY, AND THE CONSOCIATIVE CRITIC

I. On Jonson's Inconsistency

Modern critics have fractured Ben Jonson in at least three extraordinary ways. First, faced with a figure whose works present a veritable anatomy of the literary kinds, some have seen fit to anatomize him into his constituent generic parts. Wagering a conservative estimate, Alexander Legatt has remarked that “[i]t is almost as though we have divided Jonson into three different writers – the dramatist, the masque-maker, and the poet – who can be examined in isolation” (xiii). Other critics have sought to unite rather than divide and, like Menelaus binding Proteus, have yielded great variety in the process. Michael McCanles specifies “the plain-style Jonson; the stoic Jonson; the psychologist’s Jonson fixated on authority figures; the misogynist Jonson” (vii) – the list goes on. The fact that neither method has succeeded in stabilizing our understanding of Jonson has led to a third, more thorough kind of fracturing. Still other critics have come to recognize that any one of Jonson’s generic modes or overarching *personae* presents in itself a variety of poses. These poses occasionally complement each other, but more often they reveal marked disparities between Jonson and himself, disparities that critics tend to map, however cogently, onto tendentious binaries such as “the ideal and the reality” (Legatt 215) or the Dionysian and the Apollonian (Marotti 209). The cost of Jonson’s “uncanny flexibility” (Boehrer 4) is the critical dilemma of pinning him down.

Accordingly, some of the most insightful studies of Jonson have attempted to define him not in spite of but through these disparities, presenting his career as the difference

between the 1616 and the 1640 folios;¹ the product of “a typically Roman awareness of the often-incommensurable demands of virtue and efficacy” (Maus 167); the expression of “a kind of blocked and endlessly questioned poetic vision” emerging from the “radically opposed” influences of Bacon and Sidney (Newton 189); the interplay of centered and uncentered selves;² the story of a “melancholy man, full of shame and scorn” and belied by his public image;³ or that of a neurotic in Falstaffian disguise.⁴ George Parfitt instructively directs our attention not just to “Two Ben Jonsons” but to various sets of Ben Jonsons: the classicist and the romantic, the classicist and the realist, and “the seemingly calm philosopher, the good man of *Discoveries*; [and] the involved, impatient, arrogant being of *Conversations*” (33). “One way of seeing his career,” Parfitt suggests, “is as an unremitting effort to make himself and his art into something defined by his deepest beliefs and ideals, an effort thwarted time and again by the personality of the man, but also an effort which gives his art its individuality and greatness” (17). David Riggs begins his biography of Jonson by proposing a governing dialectic of “defiant risk taking and sober retrenchment” (2). As early as *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599), Riggs sees Jonson staging his “authorial self-division” through the overlapping characters of Asper and Macilente (the one plays the other) and thus dramatizing the tension between his public and private selves, between “bookish erudition” and “uncontrollable rage,” and between the productive and destructive

¹ See Brady, “Progenitors.”

² Thomas Greene, “Ben Jonson and the Centered Self,” *SEL* 10.2 (Spring 1970), 325-48.

³ William Kerrigan, “Ben Jonson Full of Shame and Scorn,” *Ben Jonson*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p. 127.

⁴ Edmund Wilson, “Morose Ben Jonson,” *The Triple Thinkers* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1976), pp. 213-32: “Ben Jonson’s enjoyment of tavern life and his great reputation for wit have created, among those who do not read him, an entirely erroneous impression of high spirits and joviality; but his portraits show rather the face of a man who habitually worries, who is sensitive and holds himself aloof, not yielding himself to intimate fellowship” (220).

forces of the imagination (59-60). We can read the whole story – and have often been invited to do so – in Jonson’s well-known ensign, a compass with one foot planted firmly at center and another that in the attempt to bridge the gap between inner and outer, ideal and actual, theory and practice, breaks.⁵

These often polarized inconsistencies extend to Jonson’s criticism, which is spread across works of various kinds written under different circumstances and presenting a host of difficulties. His most sustained critical statements, for instance, derive from the *Conversations with Drummond*, a gossipy second-hand account of Jonson’s table talk that presents a Nabokovian hermeneutic puzzle, and the bewilderingly intertextual *Timber, or Discoveries*, both of which were published posthumously in 1640. More than any other figure considered in this dissertation, Jonson thought of himself, and was thought of by others, as an authoritative judge of literary art – a *critic*, in the new, modern sense of the word. Just a few decades after his death, he would be appealed to as such by the interlocutors of Dryden’s *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* (1668), and in 1674 Thomas Rymer, in an oft-quoted bon mot, would declare that among his Elizabethan and Stuart contemporaries Jonson “had all the Critical learning to himself” (qtd. in Redwine xi). Historians of criticism going back to Spingarn have granted Jonson a foundational role in English criticism: most commonly, that of a neoclassical reformer and proto-critic who paved the way for fully formed critics such as Dryden, Pope, and Johnson.⁶ This account threatens to diminish Jonson and his accomplishment to the status of a Augustan premonition by passing over his individual

⁵ See ll. 578-9 of *Conversations with Drummond* in the Herford and Simpson edition. All citations of Jonson’s works refer to this edition and cite line numbers unless otherwise indicated.

⁶ See, for example, Wimsatt and Brooks, who proclaim Jonson “the first English man of letters to exhibit a nearly complete and consistent neo-classicism”: “His historical importance is that he throws out a vigorous announcement of the rule from which in the next generation Dryden is to be engaged in politely rationalized recessions” (181).

complexity, and the complexity of the time in which he lived, in pursuit of a Whiggish triumph. The extent to which Samuel Johnson's notion that criticism began with Dryden has endured can be gauged by the number of histories of criticism that begin after the Restoration.⁷

Not all have heeded Dr. Johnson, however, and those critics who have undertaken serious study of Jonson's criticism have found there the same "striking inconsistencies" (Marotti 210) that characterize his works on the whole. In the introduction to his edition of *Ben Jonson's Literary Criticism* (1970), James Redwine expresses his anxiety lest by collecting, organizing, and categorizing the wind-strewn bits of Jonson's criticism he might "furnish more synoptic order and unity than the spreading critical material can rightly bear" (xii). More recently, such critics as Richard Burt and Richard Dutton have historicized Jonson's criticism, respectively in the contexts of contemporary notions of censorship and the emergence of English print culture. Dutton positions his *Ben Jonson: Authority: Criticism* (1996) as the "antithesis" (xxi) to Redwine's synchronic volume, but he too acknowledges Jonson's inconsistency as a critic. For Dutton, the "evasions and internal contradictions" of Jonson's criticism stem from larger anxieties concerning "his new and indeterminate status as a professional author" (21). "As his career unfolded," Dutton writes,

the status of the written word, and with it that of the 'author', was in an unprecedented state of flux, and their relationship to other forms of political, social and religious 'authority' was radically unstable. The challenge of Jonson's criticism is that it captures that flux, that sense of instability, as no other document does, a first attempt to articulate the forces that shaped the modern literary world.

(3)

⁷ René Wellek's magisterial eight-volume *A History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* (1955-92) and Terry Eagleton's influential *The Function of Criticism* (1984) are prominent examples.

By this account, Jonson pursues one fluctuating role by way of another, burdened by the circumstances of his time with the task of simultaneously inventing the roles of modern English author and critic. To make matters worse, he does so by fits and starts in a series of disparate works scattered across time; disrupted by history, the interventions of civic authority, and the fluctuating demands of the literary market; and connected only by the persona of the author, a persona which, as we have seen, is often at odds with itself. Given these factors, consistency seems too much to expect. As a critic, Jonson would appear to stand at a primordial point of formative ruckus and chaos.

Still, if the ruckus and chaos do not originate in Jonson, he appears nevertheless deliberately to contribute to them. To be sure, in fashioning himself as a critic, he thinks in terms of opposed critical types, and his criticism, both collectively and within its constituent parts, presents us with a kind of symposium among these types. Some we have encountered before. Though Jonson himself authored an English grammar, as a critic he opposes himself to the grammarian: “*It is not the passing through these Learnings that hurts us, but the dwelling and sticking about them. To descend to those extreame anxieties, and foolish cavils of Grammarians, is able to breake a wit in pieces; being a worke of manifold misery, and vainenesse, to bee Elementarij senes*” (*Disc.* 1858-62). The mature critic must “pass through” and beyond the grammarian; his work lies elsewhere and is otherwise, as this familiar negative formulation suggests.⁸ Jonson also joins the early modern chorus in denouncing the detractor, noting in the *Discoveries* that “*Envy is no new thing*” (258) and decrying the “blatant beast” in, among other places, a lyric entitled “To My Detractor.” What we might call

⁸ For a study of negative formulations in Jonson’s poetry with interesting implications for the negative critical models to be pursued in this chapter, see Newton. See also Riggs, pp. 41-2, on how the featurelessness arising from the temperance of Jonson’s protagonists requires him to “[continually call] attention to what the protagonist is *not*” (42), and Maus, pp. 22-46, on the difficulty of dramatically representing the “colorlessness” of Stoic virtue (33).

Sidnean idealism, if only with reference to my second chapter, offers Jonson a critical stronghold from which to posit timeless definitions of “poet” and “poem” (*Disc.* 2346-61). It alternatively supplies him with a coherent critical other when he crucially qualifies his formalism and classicism to accommodate his audience and his ambition (e.g., pref. to *Volp.* 109-23, *Disc.* 2555-65). His (common) experience as actor and playwright likewise provides him with what critics often refer to as a “democratic” critical perspective, one that benefitted him even as it repulsed him.

These familiar categories and types, however, account for only a small portion of the panoply of critics with which Jonson populates his works. We find critical heroes in Crites of *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), Lorenzo, Jr., of *Every Man in his Humour* (1598), Cordatus of *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599), and Horace of *Poetaster* (1601). In those same plays, Jonson gives us critical antagonists in Amorphus, Bobadilla, Mitis, and Lupus. Here he speaks through critics of his own creation and there he is spoken through by such critics as Quintilian, Juan Luis Vives, and Daniel Heinsius. Amidst the bustle, he urges discretion; indeed, it is the bustle which creates an occasion for discretion. Jonson leads the way, distinguishing between readers and understanders (e.g., “To the Reader,” *The Alchemist*); between readers ordinary and extraordinary (“To the Reader in Ordinarie” and “To the Reader extraordinary,” *Catiline*); between the “Learned Critic” and the “Mere English Censurer” (*Epigrams* XVII and XVIII); and between the “curious and enuious” and the “fauoring and iudicious” (*B. Fayre*, Induc., 75-6). In the elegy on Shakespeare, he begins by strenuously distinguishing his critical perspective from that of “seeliest Ignorance” (7), “blinde Affection” (9), and “crafty Malice” (11). In the “Ode to Himself” appended to the octavo of the failed play *The New Inn* (1629), he boldly sets himself and his works over against “such as have no taste” (14). And in an epistolary poem addressed to Joseph Rutter,

he expresses the difficulty of making such metacritical distinctions by ironically applying the adjective “understanding” to those censorious theater-goers who fancy themselves “deeper-grounded, understanding men” (7). To distinguish between the understander and the “understander,” as between the virtuous and the vicious poet, is specialized work, and Jonson takes pains to emphasize that idea.

Converting the riches of Quintilian to his own use in the *Discoveries*, Jonson presents an extensive typology of wits – the precocious wit who comes to nothing, the ostentatious wit, the affectedly rough wit, the plagiarizing poet-ape – and contrasts them all to “the true Artificer” (669-800). “There are no fewer formes of minds, then of bodies amongst us,” he proclaims with wonder, drawing upon a mind-body analogy that, as we shall see, helped to shape his idea of the critic (672-3). “The variety is incredible,” he adds; “and therefore we must search” (674). The valuable metacritical knowledge yielded by such a search outfits Jonson with satirical armor against would-be critics in the Induction to *Cynthia’s Revels*. There, Boy #3 presents a typology of his own, surveying a variety of what Jonson elsewhere calls “chamber-critics” and distinguishing between the courtly “ciuet-wit,” the mustachioed braggart, the “great-bellied juggler” whose taste is as outdated as his “doublet,” the dullard, and a fifth critic who “only shakes his bottle-head, and out of his corkie braine, squeezeth out a pittiful-learned face, and is silent” (199-217). Later on in the comedy, Crites will win our admiration with his ability to imitate the courtly fops who surround him (5.4.570-606). Not satisfied to let the stark contrast between the judgment of his hero and the humorous opinions of his antagonists speak for itself, Jonson has Crites embody those antagonists and master them by containing them. It is a portrait of Jonson’s criticism in miniature.

This final chapter presents Ben Jonson as an inheritor of, and an interlocutor with, many of the ideas and modes of critical and metacritical thought presented in this

dissertation. Stopping short of entertaining the kind of triumphalism that has so often left Jonson in the margins, it also reveals by way of Jonson an idea of the critic noteworthy for its engagement of what Jonson calls “consociation” and, in my application of the term, signifies the pursuit and cultivation of interdisciplinary, cross-cultural avenues of thought that bring critical knowledge to bear upon other fields of discourse in early modern England, and vice versa. Each of the various ideas of the critic examined in this dissertation depends for its formulation upon a discursive kind of strife, a productive mode of differentiation that goes beyond the merely linguistic, a process by which critical identity and authority are conceived in relation to other *personae*, critical and otherwise. What makes Jonson stand out (which is not to say above) is his containment of a pluralistic mode of this process within himself and his works, and it is this as much as historical circumstance, I argue, that generates his critical inconsistency. If from one perspective Jonson is inconsistent, from another he is legion, a Whitmanesque critic who contains multitudes. The consociative critic he evokes is a self-contained symposium, a platform for a bustle of opinions “contrary in themselves” (*Disc.* 1763-4), and so must be satisfied to be contrary in himself. What Jonson adds to our understanding of the critic derives from his sense of being stationed chin-deep in the stream of inconsistency on our behalf, as readers, and serving as a Janus-like mediator not just between literary works and our participation in them but also between literary works and themselves and between a myriad of ways of appreciating and depreciating them. It is, in Jonson’s understanding of it, a self-sacrificing role. As a critic, he teaches so that his readers “should not be alwayes to be taught” (1755-6).

II. “Polyposi Erat, Non Nasuti”

Writing in the margins of his copy of the 1619 Scriverius edition of Martial, Jonson finds himself hemmed in by critics. It is a position, I will argue, characteristic of his criticism

on the whole, one which he pursues with regularity. Equally characteristic is his response to this position, which is to cut through the crowd with a metacritical distinction – but first, some context.

The Scriverius edition features a rich critical apparatus, and sorting out the layers of the text, and keeping track of the many critical voices represented there, can be dizzying. At one point, Jonson responds to a letter written by Justus Lipsius to Janus Lernutius and excerpted by Scriverius. “What’s your opinion?” Lipsius asks his correspondent,

Hasn’t Scaliger judged better of Martial, who says that his verses are clear, rhythmic, and full and that many of his *Epigrams* are divine, than he, who calls him a street-corner buffoon? I wish that this injudicious judgment had never escaped the great man. Martial is nothing to Catullus, I know; but I also know that his *Epigrams* were born neither of the street corner nor, entirely, of the salon. Sure, many of his poems are filthy and pornographic. And by God the poems in Catullus's tiny book aren't any purer; there are just fewer of them. He who makes such an accusation is ignorant of the world in which these poets lived [Quid censens tu? non melius de Martiale Scaliger iudicavit, qui versus eius candidos, numerosos, plenos, Epigrammata multa divina dicit: quam ille, qui scurram de trivio appellat? Nollem excidisset viro magno hoc iudicium iudicii dissimile. Nihil ad Catullum Martialis, scio: sed & hoc scio, Epigrammata illa nec in trivio nata, nec omnia in triclinio. Multa foeda, obscoena in Martiale: & mehercule in uno Catulli libello non pudiciora, sed pauciora. Ignorat saeculum illud, qui hoc accusat].⁹

The page is overcrowded before Jonson even puts his pen to it. To say nothing of Lernutius, whose opinion is merely solicited, this passage sets in dialogue the critical judgments of Lipsius, Julius Caesar Scaliger, and Marc Antoine Muret, the unnamed but nonetheless clearly implied critic who famously compared Martial’s poetry to “the sayings of some street-corner buffoon [dicta scurrae alicuius de trivio].”¹⁰ The addition of a second critical subject in Catullus, whom both Lipsius and Muret prefer to Martial, further

⁹ M. Val. Martialis Nova Editio. Ex Museo Petri Scriverii (Leiden: 1619), sig. B3^v. Jonson’s personal copy of this book, to which I turn later in this paragraph, is currently housed at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

¹⁰ Muret’s criticism appears a few pages later at sig. B5^v.

complicates matters. Clearly an admirer of Muret, Lipsius laments what he perceives to be an unwonted lapse in judgment. He sides with Scaliger, who has “judged ... better,” and Jonson sides with him, elbowing his way into the discussion from the margin and adding yet another layer to the text and voice to the symposium.

By way of defending Martial and impugning the judgment of Muret, Jonson makes a striking metacritical distinction: “polyposi erat, non Nasuti [he had a nasal tumor, not a long nose].” The terminology of this marginal comment, which distinguishes between those critics with long noses (*nasuti*) and those afflicted by disfiguring and obstructive polyps (*polyposi*), comes from Martial himself:

Nasutus nimium cupis videri.
nasutum volo, nolo polyposum.
[You long to appear long-nosed.
A long-nosed man I like; I object to one with a nasal tumor.]

(12.37)

Here and elsewhere in Martial, long noses point to penetrating wit and keen critical discretion – in other words, a knack for poking into things and sniffing them out.¹¹ Statius and Phaedrus employ noses to similar ends,¹² and Roman sculptors relied upon this well-established association when shaping noses and nostrils “to express criticism, anger, and scorn.”¹³ Playing upon that association, the polyposus corrupts the virtue of discretion with a malignancy that inhibits smell and taste, giving only the appearance of nasal and critical bounty. Lost in a crowd of critics who threaten not only to undermine the status of his

¹¹ See, for instance, 1.3, 2.54, and 13.2. For more on Martial’s use of the term *nasutus*, see Martial, *Epigrams: Book II*, ed. Craig A. Williams (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004), p. 188.

¹² The former in *Silvae* 4.9 and the latter in Phaedr. 4.7. See K. Coleman, “Silvae 4.9: a Statian name-game,” *Proceedings of the African Classical Associations* 14 (1978), 9–10.

¹³ Christopher H. Hallett, *The Roman Nude: Heroic Portrait Statuary, 200 B.C.-A.D. 300* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005), p. 284.

beloved Martial but, worse yet, to overshadow his own self-perceived authority as a critic, Jonson intervenes with a comment that addresses not Martial, not the *Epigrams*, but their critic in Muret. What's more, the comment attempts not to correct Muret by revealing the poetic virtues of Martial but rather to render Muret irrelevant by revealing his own innate critical deficiency. Jonson thus parts the crowd and distinguishes himself with a comment that attends to the manner rather than the particular content of literary judgment. Responding directly to Muret a few pages later, he takes a similar approach, emphasizing his harshness as a critic over his error: "durè, durè, mi Murete, et false [harsh, harsh, my Muret, and false, too]."¹⁴

It is plain to see why the metacritical categories of *nasutus* and *polyposus* would have appealed to Jonson. The *nasutus* would appear to possess his long nose naturally, an idea that accords nicely with Jonson's sense that "[t]here is no doctrine will doe good, where nature is wanting" (*Disc.* 677-8). Likewise, the *polyposus* would have affirmed and enriched Jonson's own association of bad criticism and bad taste with "*Contagion*" (*B. Fayre*, Induc., 98) and "disease" (*Disc.* 300). He could be thinking of Muret when he describes in the *Discoveries* the eating disorder of those critics "borne only to sucke out the poyson of bookes" who seek out only "the obscene, and foule things," whether for pleasure or censure: "*Habent venenum pro victu: imo, pro deliciis* [they take poison for their nourishment: nay, for their pleasure]" (1020-3). These categories additionally would have provided Jonson with a useful means of thinking about bodily presentations and representations of wit. They would have entertained his fascination with the analogous variety of bodies and minds (*Disc.* 672-3) and reaffirmed his idea that nature forms a variety of both to different ends (*Disc.* 846-61). In brief, the *polyposi* and the *nasuti* of Martial and the ancient Romans would have appealed to

¹⁴ sig. B5^v

Jonson for their evocation of a crowded and diverse critical field that creates an occasion for discretion while opening up avenues of what Jonson calls “consociation.” For to invoke these figures is at once to narrow the critical field and to draw fruitful connections between criticism and the human body, criticism and disease, and criticism and physic. It is a process that simultaneously grants the role of the critic specificity and broad cultural relevance.

Yet we needn’t leave the matter to conjecture, for we have strong evidence that these categories did appeal to Jonson. The first page of the 1601 quarto of *Cynthia’s Revels* bears the inscription “AD LECTOREM: Nasutum volo, nolo Polyposum.” In the 1616 and 1640 folios, this epigraph was shifted to a place of even greater prominence on the title page, and the “AD LECTOREM” was dropped, perhaps because a direct dialogue with an attentive reader was now assumed. Each successive printing reiterates Martial’s metacritical distinction as a set of instructions for the reader and would-be critic. But repetition fails to resolve the obscurity of those cryptic Latin terms, and the meaning of the instructions they contain remains unspecific if not unclear. The first clause may have reminded Jonson’s most attentive readers of the bold provocation of Asper, Jonson’s stand-in in *Every Man out of his Humour*, written just a year earlier: “Let me be censur’d, by th’austerest brow” (“second Sounding,” 60). And perhaps the second would have recalled to that same reader the vices of those “narrow-ey’d decypherers” described by Cordatus, the built-in critic of the same play (2.6.171-3). Whether his audience knows it or not, Jonson uses Martial and his metacritical categories to build upon and develop his own ideas about criticism and judgment.

He continues to do so, and grants a new degree of definition to his borrowed terminology, in the “Apologetical Dialogue” appended to *Poetaster*. Unfortunately, this dialogue, in which Jonson seeks to clarify his purposes in writing the play and to defend

himself from Marston, Dekker, and other rivals, was “only once spoken upon the stage” (3-4). Suppressed by “Authority,” the dialogue was not granted a second performance and was excluded from the 1602 quarto of the play.¹⁵ Whatever clarity it brings to Jonson’s idea of the critic was thus available only to a select few before its greatly delayed printing in the 1616 folio. The dialogue presents another crowd of critics, but in this instance the categories that Jonson applies in the margin of his edition of Martial precede discourse. The interlocutors – Nasutus, Polyposus, and Author – are introduced at the outset, and the categories their names represent govern the dialogue. In a metacritical allegory, names and (speech) actions reciprocally inform each other.

Amenable to the Author’s notion of his imperviousness to envy and transcendence of the “temporall plagues” (177) of his time, Nasutus fails to grasp what theater-goers have found so offensive about *Poetaster*. “What was there in it could so deeply offend?” (70). Content to listen to the Author, he speaks by far the fewest lines of the three interlocutors. He “reuerence[s]” (240) the muses rather than the multitude and makes a point of disassociating himself from the “manners” (22) of his critical other. Meanwhile, Polyposus eagerly parrots the accusations of Jonson’s rivals:

they say you tax’d
The law, and Lawyers; Captaines; and the Players
by their particular names

(81-3)

What matters to this agitator is not the truth value of these accusations (18), nor even their specific content, but only that “the Multitude ... think [the Author] hit, and hurt” (40-1). When the Author refuses to address his charges, Polyposus pronounces him “undone” (154). “With whom?” asks the Author. “The world,” Polyposus replies (155). The

¹⁵ See Dutton, pp. 80-1.

metacritical distinction established by this dialogue thus defines the critic by opposing timelessness to time and the “learn’d,” “liberall,” and presumably free-breathing individual to “the stuff’d nostrills of the drunken rout” (208-9). “[I]f I proue the pleasure but of one,” the Author claims, “So he iudicious be; He shall b’alone / A Theater vnto me” (226-8). He finds that one judicious reader in Nasutus and invites his other readers – if they have “deseru’d that name” (1) – to find themselves in Nasutus as well.

If these two instances demonstrate the value that Jonson found in the categories of polyposus and nasutus, and, more generally, his tendency as a critic to think through critical types, it nevertheless leaves these critical types incompletely defined. Unfortunately, Jonson left us only this one dialogue and portrait of Nasutus and Polyposus. How it might have compared to the lost dialogue prefacing Jonson’s translation of the *Ars Poetica* of Horace, a dialogue that may have pitted a version of Jonson himself against a version of John Donne called “Criticus,” cannot be known (*Comp.* 84-5). Yet all is not lost. What Jonson did leave us in his works is a scattered panoply of critics who together, across the boundaries of the works and contexts in which they individually appear, constitute a symposium in which their judgments, methods, and “manners” are set in dialogue. It is a small step from comparing the critical prefaces of *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* to comparing the Jonson of the *Discoveries* to Cordatus of *Every Man out of his Humor* or Crites of *Cynthia’s Revels*. And indeed, making that step brings us that much closer to Jonson’s idea of the critic. Filling out our understanding of the crowded critical field in which Jonson positioned himself, or imagined himself positioned, and the various polyposi and nasuti he found there demands only that we take the interpretive liberty of applying those categories to the critics and types of critics in Jonson’s works that happen to go by other names or, in some cases, no name at all.

The Polyposus who, in the “Apologetical Dialogue,” privileges the opinion of the multitude over the understanding of the author or the judicious critic haunts the critical writings of Jonson in various forms. He lurks, for instance, behind the distinction made in the *Discoveries* between opinion and understanding: “*Opinion* is a light, vaine, crude, and imperfect thing, settled in the Imagination; but never arriving at the understanding, there to obtaine the tincture of *Reason*” (43-5). The very structure of this sentence, which hinges its metacritical opposition with a semicolon, recalls another distinction made on behalf of “the Reader in Ordinaire” in *Catiline*. There, the “multitude” becomes the “moste,” and critics or readers of understanding become, uniquely, “men,” an ennobling category for Jonson: “the moste commend out of affection, selfe tickling, an easinesse, or imitation: but men iudge only out of knowledge” (“Reader in Ordinaire,” *Cat.*).¹⁶ Together these analogous distinctions demonstrate how Jonson’s metacritical thought maintains structural coherence despite fluid terminology. Whether he calls it “opinion” or “affection,” Jonson gives us in these passages the sense, on the one hand, of a mode of judgment founded upon nothing more solid than the “Aery shapes” of Fancy described by Adam in *Paradise Lost* (5.105).

The description may remind us of the lesser courtiers of *Cynthia’s Revels*, who play games with words – and particularly with adjectives, the airiest part of speech – merely to entertain themselves and to indulge their chronic narcissism with “selfe tickling.” The “lightness” or “vanity” of opinion likewise helps to explain the “easinesse” with which it flits, like a moth or an airborne virus, from one mind to another through “imitation” in *Catiline* or “*Contagion*” in *Bartholmew Fayre* (Induc. 98). Its *imperfection* or *crudeness* – the sense that Jonson gives us in the *Discoveries* of opinion as a thing malformed – reflects the impermanence it displays in Jonson’s other works, its tendency to die along with all else that

¹⁶ The epistle appears, with lines unnumbered, at 5.432 in the Herford and Simpson edition.

was not mixed equally. “They die with their conceits” (23), Jonson proclaims of the ballad-obsessed “greedie Frie” (19) in “An Ode. To Himself.” Consoling John Fletcher, whose *Faithfull Shepheardesse* has been poorly received, Jonson promises that the work

shall rise
A glorified worke to Time, when Fire,
Or moathes shall eate, what all these Fooles admire.

(14-6)

Elsewhere he singles out John Selden as a man of understanding simply by praising him for “disesteem[ing]” opinions (40). Throughout his works, we find Jonson pitting the understanding of various judicious individuals – *nasuti* – against the opinion of the multitude, the most, the greedy fry, the *polyposi*. He inherited from the Roman moralists a habit, as Katharine Eisaman Maus has shown, of “separating the sheep and the goats” (132), and this is its metacritical expression. For Jonson, the distinction transcends class, for “all are the multitude; only they differ in cloaths, not in judgement or understanding” (*Disc.* 644-6).

Whatever his shape, the polyposus never stands alone. Rather, he stands for a multitude of vicious, self-interested critics, who read with an eye to their own fame, material gain, or humorous pleasure. “[S]uch are they that only relish the obscene, and foule things in *Poets*” (*Disc.* 1022-3) – these poison-sucking critics we have already seen. Jonson links this critical vice to another, noting that the undue emphasis of the obscene in poetry has left “the profession taxed.” “But by whom?” he hastens to ask (in a crowded and diverse critical field, one should always consider the source). He answers himself: “men, that watch for it, and ... are so unjust valuers of Letters; as they thinke no Learning good, but what brings in gaine” (1023-6).

We thus find Jonson, as a poet and a critic, butting up against the trend of pragmatism addressed at length elsewhere in this dissertation.¹⁷ Like Harvey, Nashe, and other critics who shared this position with him, Jonson demonstrates a degree of sophistication in his negotiation of it. In “To My Booke-Seller” (*Ep.* III), he comfortably acknowledges the alignment of literary and market value in the emerging print culture: “Thou ... Call’st a booke good, or bad, as it doth sell” (1-2). He asks only that his book, and his reputation, not be degraded through overeager marketing. Despite this equanimity, figures such as Lorenzo, Sr., in *Every Man in his Humour* and Ovid, Sr., in *Poetaster* satirize a bourgeois perspective from which poetry appears a waste of time. Of the divine Homer, Ovid, Sr., asks “But could this diuinitie feed him, while he liu’d?” (1.2.91-3). It is a perspective that unites the multitude, as Jonson observes in the *Discoveries*: “the great heard, the multitude; that in all other things are divided; in this alone conspire, and agree: To love money” (1450-2). “He, that hath coine,” sneers Ovid, Jr., “hath all perfection else” (1.2.256).

In a concatenation of critical vices, Jonson further links such materialism to detraction. Crispinus and Demetrius, Jonson’s thinly veiled figures for Marston and Dekker in *Poetaster*, cater to the taste of the multitude in the interest of making money. Crispinus hopes to offset his debts with poetry (3.4.62), and, glancing sidelong at Dekker’s *Satiromastix*, the actor Histrio confesses to Tucca that he has employed Demetrius “to abuse HORACE ... in a play” in hopes of making “a huge deale of money” (3.4.322-7). *Poetaster* on the whole presents a cautionary tale on the topic of detraction in which Crispinus, Demetrius, Lupus, and the other antagonists of the play seek to defame Horace, to upset his standing with his patron Mecaenas, and to incriminate him before Caesar, all in the interest of increasing their wealth and, perhaps to the same end, their fame. Yet Mecaenas, like Nasutus, is not subject

¹⁷ See pp. 115-7 above.

to “those poore affections / Of vnder-mining enuie and detraction” (3.1251-2). And Caesar Augustus, who himself hosts a Jonsonian symposium in the fifth act, opposes “dull detractions” with praise and “high grace to *poesie*” (5.1.33-4). In the end, the emperor grants Horace and Virgil the authority to decide, pronounce, and execute punishment for the vices whom Jonson will contain in *Polyposus* in the dialogue he appended to the play.

The metacritical valence of the plot of *Poetaster* is made clear as early as the prologue, where “Envie” enters promising

To blast your pleasures, and destroy your sports,
With wrestings, comments, applications,
Spie-like suggestions, priuie whisperings,
And thousand such promooting sleights as these.

(“second Sounding,” 23-6)

Jonson here emphasizes the destructive power of the kind of incendiary criticism he associates with *Polyposus*. As a critic, Envie, like *Polyposus*, looks for trouble and pursues it even to the extent of deliberately “wresting” the meaning of a work away from the intentions of its author. At the end of the play, Caesar will connect the practice of Envie to that of *Lupus*, who attempts through “sinister application” to

distort, and straine
The generall scope and purpose of an author,
To his particular and priuate spleene.

(5.3.140-4)

Her “spy-like suggestions,” “privy whisperings,” and various “promoting sleights” – in this period “promoting” suggested the work of a political informant (*OED*) – all point toward the very real trouble that such reading had already created for Jonson in the cases of *The Isle of Dogs* and *Eastward Ho* and would create for him in the case of *Poetaster* as well. Jonson was imprisoned for the *Isle of Dogs* and nearly had his nose and ears cut, or disfigured, for

Eastward Ho.¹⁸ As we have seen, the “Apologetical Dialogue” itself was censored in a historical moment of intense irony. “Application, is now, growne a trade with many” (65) Jonson observes in the preface to *Volpone*, and it was hardly a casual observation. He could speak with authority on the wages of bad reading and malicious criticism because he had paid them. As Richard Dutton has demonstrated with remarkable insight, the preface to *Volpone* jointly addresses matters of poetic and English law, responding through criticism to the specific historical circumstances that shaped Jonson’s relation to power as poet and critic (81-97).

Beyond injuring Jonson’s sense of proper critical practice, the polyposi thus posed more grave and immediate threats to his livelihood, liberty, and body. It is a testament to his critical integrity, therefore, that he appears no less concerned by the threat they posed to the authority he assumed as a critic. In the interest of underscoring and preserving that authority, Jonson establishes a legitimating distinction, to borrow Richard Burt’s phrase,¹⁹ by regularly presenting the polyposus as an amateur. He values the critical judgment of his theatrical audience at the price of admission (*B. Fayre*, Induc., 85-96). Taking issue with his “person” rather than his “judgment,” as in the cases of Muret and Polyposus, he belittles the “Courtling” of *Epigram* LXXII, who casually pronounces his literary judgments over dinner, by labeling him a “chamber-critick” (2). In *Discoveries*, he self-reflexively distinguishes between “certaine *Scioli*, or *smatterers*, that are busie in the skirts, and out-sides of Learning” and true scholarship (228-35). These “skirts, and out-sides” recall Philautia, the self-loving lady of *Cynthia’s Revels* who “has a good superficiall iudgement in painting; and would seeme to haue so in *poetry*” (2.4.44-6). When, in *Every Man out of his Humour*, Matheo and Bobadilla

¹⁸ See Riggs, pp. 32, 124.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Burt, pp. 13, 15. Burt defines censorship in its critical capacity as “a mechanism for legitimating and delegitimizing access to discourse” (12).

attempt to mislead and abuse the other spectators, like the double-speaking vice of a morality play. The sheer strenuousness of this elaborate performance speaks to the stark distinction between this critic and “the iudicious,” a distinction made in the opening parenthesis, and to the effort required of him to appear to be that which he is not.

The work of the true, judicious critic is – on the contrary – highly specialized. To this chamber critic Jonson opposes Cordatus, who exhibits the same admixture of learning and qualified formalism and classicism that characterizes Jonson himself. Whereas Jonson famously recommended the ancients as “Guides, not Commanders” (*Disc.* 137-9) and sought to liberate the poet from “the narrowe limits of lawes” (*Disc.* 2555-7), Cordatus defines comedy from Cicero (3.6.202-12) yet, noting the liberties taken by Plautus and others, argues that “we should enjoy the same licence ... and not be tyed to those strict and regular formes, which the nicenesse of a few ... would thrust vpon us” (“second Sounding,” 266-70). Lest we fail to acknowledge it ourselves, Jonson has Mitis acknowledge the authority of this critic: “you are better traded with these things then I, and therefore I’le subscribe to your iudgment” (2.3.302-3). Scene by scene, as Cordatus defends Jonson and his work from “narrow-ey’d decypherers” (2.6.171) and other such polyposi, he figures forth from within a crowd of critics and invoked critical types just the sort of criticism that Jonson not only sanctions but invites. The first clause of that richly significant epigraph – “nasutum volo” – points to the epigram that Jonson addresses “To the Learned Critick” (*Ep.* XVII). While others “feare, flie, and traduce” the critic, Jonson entreats his judgment in the knowledge that “but a sprigge of bayes, giuen by thee” will grant his poems “a legitimate fame” (3-5).

It is no accident that Jonson follows this epigram with one addressed “To My Meere English Censurer” (*Ep.* XVIII). Once again, in the pages of the *Epigrams*, Jonson hosts a symposium, including not just these two critics but, among others, the “Censorious

Covrting” (LII), the “Groome Ideot” (LVIII), the “Play-wright” (LXVIII), and, as we have seen, the “chamber-critick” (LXXII, 2). In this crowd of polyposi, the learned critic necessarily stands out. His judgment is valuable, in part, simply because it is so rare. As Jonson writes to Donne, let hack playwrights, who “for claps doe write,” be satisfied with the praise of porters, players, and “puisnes” (novices in law or judgment):²¹ “A man should seeke great glorie, and not broad” (*Ep.* XCVI, 9-12). Crites of *Cynthia’s Revels* shares this wisdom: “Let them be good that loue me, though but few” (3.4.107). “[T]he most favour common errors” (“To the Reader,” *Alc.*, 30); accordingly, Jonson places critical authority in the hands of the “few.” Just as Caesar grants Virgil and Horace the authority to punish the vices of *Poetaster*, so Cynthia grants Crites the authority to punish the vices of *Cynthia’s Revels*.

Where the polyposus is narcissistic and disingenuous, the nasutus is selfless and honest. Jonson had a complicated relationship with flattery. In his poems, as Richard Helgerson has succinctly put it, “he regrets his flattery almost as often as he denies it” (177). He praises Selden while confessing, in the same breath, that he has perhaps too often “preferr’d / Men past their termes” (*Und.* XIV, 20-1). Yet, as the *Conversations* demonstrate all too well, he hardly bridled his tongue as a critic, not even when it came to friends and acquaintances such as Donne and Shakespeare. In the “Ode to Himself” appended to the *New Inn*, he goes so far as to slight his onetime manservant and devotee Richard Brome (27-8). If Jonson did not always fulfill his critical ideals, he admires their fulfillment in others, such as Donne, who judges with “authoritie” and “free simplicity” (*Ep.* XCVI, 4-6), and Asper, “whom no seruile hope of gaine, or frosty apprehension of danger, can make to be a Parasite, either to time, place, or opinion” (*EMo*, “Names of the Actors,” 4-6). These were

²¹ Herford and Simpson offer only “juniors” (11.19 n. 10), but the *OED*, at *puisne*, adj. and n., indicates that the word often had legal connotations, as in “puisne judge.”

stars to sail by. “[I]f I have any thing right,” Jonson humbly pleads in the *Discoveries*, “defend it as Truth’s, not mine” (155-6).

Such selfless service of truth tends, in Jonson’s works, to make critics poor and unpopular. Crites is dismissed as “a triuiall fellow” (1.4.176); Horace, as we have seen, is maligned and slandered; and Macilente, the embittered scholar of *Every Man out*, takes his name from the Italian word for “emaciated.” Yet it is not misfortune per se that verifies the nasutus as such but rather indifference to misfortune. Better to be poor than a parasite, Jonson argues (“To My Muse,” *Ep.* LXV). This criterion sets the humorous Macilente apart from the temperate Horace and Crites and, at times, sets Jonson apart from himself, as when he envies Brome his success. But the ideal is nonetheless clear. Jonson observes in the *Discoveries* that “*Good Men*” are often thought mad because they refuse to partake of the madness of the world (1104-6). “[P]lac’d high on top of all vertue,” they look down “on the Stage of the world” and condemn the “Play of *Fortune*” (1106-8). The context of this observation is explicitly moral – and specifically biblical – but the thinking, its terms, and the dramatic origins of its chief metaphor hearken back to the distinction made elsewhere, and often, between the understanding individual and the opinionated multitude or “most”: “For though the most be Players, some must be *Spectators*” (1108-9). While the polyposus plays the critic, crossing his arms and showcasing his superficial judgment in pursuit of some self-interested end, the nasutus is simply himself, a judicious spectator beholden only to truth. “Be you your selues” (5.3.621), Caesar advises Horace and Virgil at the end of *Poetaster*, and indeed they are. Crites, too, in the words of Mercury, “striues rather to bee that which men call iudicious, then to bee thought so” (2.3.131-3).

Where the polyposus wrests and applies, the nasutus exercises charity – a distinction which does not necessarily require us to tread beyond Jonson’s own employment of these

categories in the “Apologetical Dialogue.” There we find Polyposus pressing the Author to answer the “libells” of his rivals while Nasutus supposes the Author to be untroubled by envy. In the dedicatory epistle to *Volpone*, Jonson implicitly contrasts the “uncharitable thought” (42) of the critic who equates poets and poetasters to that of the “learned, and charitable critick” whose “faith” in the author leads him to assume that where comic laws have been broken, they have been broken with good reason (111-2). Quintilian’s advice that the magister “temper his powers and descend to the intellect of his audience [temperare vires suas et ad intellectum audientis descendere]” (1.2.27-8) spoke to Jonson, and he converts it to his own use in the *Discoveries*, amplifying the charity of the sentiment: “a Master should temper his owne powers, and descend to the others infirmity” (1791-2). He found support in Heinsius for the idea that “the office of a true *Critick*, or *Censor*, is, not to throw by a letter any where, or damne an innocent Syllabe, but lay the words together, and amend them; judge sincerely of the Author, and his matter” (*Disc.* 2586-9).²² That is, the true critic eschews the nitpicking of the grammarian at the level of the individual syllable, word, or phrase and instead considers the formal interrelation a work’s constituent parts with regard to the intentions of its Author. To the idea of the critic as a “Tinker” or bad physician, who “make more faults, then they mend ordinarily” (*Disc.* 2579-85), Jonson opposes this idea of the critic as a teacher who seeks to free a work from faults (“amend,” v. 2, *OED*) and pursues, by way of charity, productive rather than destructive ends.

Later on in this same passage from the *Discoveries*, Jonson recommends Horace, “an Author of much Civilitie,” as a model of the kind of criticism he has in mind (2590-1). He conveniently presents him as such in *Poetaster*, where we find Horace first imagining and later helping to realize an ideal critical symposium. Projecting it onto the house of Mecaenas,

²² For the source of this passage in Heinsius, see 11.288 n. 2586-90 in the Herford and Simpson edition.

Horace first presents this ideal as a corrective to the envy of Crispinus, who proposes that he and Horace raise their fame by defaming Virgil and Varius:

There's no man greeu'd, that this is thought more rich,
Or this more learned; each man hath his place,
And to his merit, his reward of grace:
Which with a mutuall loue they all embrace.

(3.1.254-9)

Envy has no place at the house of Mecaenas precisely because “each man hath his place.” Poets and critics mutually acknowledge and embrace a critical hierarchy that, if it distinguishes between degrees of richness, learning, and merit, nevertheless makes room and provides grace enough for all. Later on in the play, Horace, Mecaenas, Tibullus, Gallus, and Augustus will embody this ideal as they extol the virtues of Virgil. Their critical discourse is governed by a dictum offered by Horace as the principle of his own disinterested critical judgment: “what I know is due, I'll giue to all” (5.1.91). Charity thus guarantees the consensus with which Caesar validates the collective judgment of this symposium: “This one consent, in all your doomes of [Virgil] ... Argues a trueth of merit in you all” (5.1.139-41).

Just as he punishes Muret for the harshness of his critical manner, so Jonson applauds and rewards other critics in his works for their charity. We admire Crites because he is “as distant from deprauing another mans merit, as [he is from] proclaiming his owne” (2.3.135-6). Jonson thus promotes charity as a metacritical criterion of inherent value. But critical charity presents at least three benefits beyond itself. First, as we have seen, it contributes to what Caesar calls “trueth of merit” through the promotion of consensus. Charity guarantees not only that each man gets his due but also that what each man gets is embraced with “mutuall loue.” Yet Caesar does not host his symposium in a vacuum; in fact, it is shortly interrupted by the slanderous intervention of Lupus. The second benefit of charity, which would appear to undermine the first by admitting uncharitable critics into the

symposium, is to give each man his say. Ultimately, however – a point which it has been impossible to postpone entirely – the crowded, diverse, and often chaotic critical field that charity creates provides an occasion for the nasuti to distinguish themselves and to demonstrate their critical discretion.

Nestled at the roots of the name itself – κριτής, f. κρίνω, to separate, part, put asunder, distinguish (*L & S*) – discretion characterizes the proper critic for Jonson as for Harvey. At the end of *Cynthia's Revels*, Arete cedes to Crites the share of authority granted her by Cynthia to punish the vices of the play, urging him to practice this virtue, for which he was named: “CRITES, practise thy discretion” (5.11.119). Discretion enables Crites to redeem the “name of courtier” (5.1.36) by distinguishing false virtue from true. Here, as in *Every Man in his Humour*, discretion maintains those critical distinctions without which names – whether that of courtier, poet, or critic – would become, in the words of Lorenzo, Jr., “preposterously transchangd”:

Giu[lliano]. Call you this poetry?
Lo[renzo].iii. Poetry? nay then call blasphemie, religion;
Call Diuels, Angels; and Sinne, pietie:
Let all things be preposterously transchangd.

(5.3.304-7)

Nasuti, as we have seen, distinguish themselves in Jonson's works with the ability to tell poet from poetaster and, at a metacritical remove, understanding from mere opinion. Lorenzo, Jr., identifies himself as such a critic, and distinguishes himself from “the multitude,” by setting a “difference twixt” the work of poetaster Matheo and poetry “such as it is, / Blessed, aeternall, and most true deuine” (5.3.312-43). The critical chaos that threatens to arise from a total lack of discretion was a nightmare to Jonson: “I know not truly which is

worse; hee that malignes all, or that praises all. There is as great a vice in praising, and as frequent, as in detracting” (*Disc.* 1632-5).

Admitting polyposi and nasuti alike, charity allows for the diverse field in which discretion finds work and distinctions obtain meaning. In return, discretion prevents charity from unleashing a critical chaos in which all is praised or maligned and names are “preposterously transchangd.” Michael McCanles has observed at the formal level of Jonson’s non-dramatic verse an “all-pervasive” technique of “contrastivity” that “underwrites” the discriminations made within (vii): “The act of discrimination appears as the hallmark of Jonson’s life and career, and is therefore registered at every level of his writing, from the lowly comma and semicolon up to the large discriminations between reality and appearance, human power and weakness, ethical respectability and depravity, and the true and false public signs of these, which collectively constitute the major concerns of all of his writings” (45). We might safely add to this list the nasutus and the polyposus, those diametrically opposed types of critical virtue and vice that Jonson continues to develop, compare, and distinguish throughout his works. From the formal perspective McCanles provides, to claim that charity creates an occasion for distinction may simply be to restate a “dialectic between the statements available to the poet’s argument, and those he chooses to write” (4) or, more generally still, the relation of *langue* to *parole*. As Milton famously observed, the fallen know good only by evil; all meaning, not merely the idea of the critic, depends upon difference.

A third benefit of critical charity, however, complicates this picture considerably and rescues it from foundering on semiotics (and potentially dissolving into a post-structuralist oil spill). For while it is often the role of charity in Jonsonian criticism to stage a polyphonic, pluralist symposium that discretion all too easily shuts down in the process of its own

constitution – *polyposi erat, non Nasuti* – elsewhere Jonson orchestrates such symposia in pursuit of precisely the kind of commingling or “consociation” that threatens to muddle distinctions: “Learning needs rest: Sovereignty gives it. Sovereignty needs counsell: Learning affords it. There is such a Consociation of offices, between the *Prince*, and whom his favour breeds, that they may helpe to sustaine his power, as hee their knowledge” (65-9). With this observation, Jonson acknowledges the roles of scholar and prince as mutually sustaining. But this “Consociation of offices” achieves and means something more than merely the sustenance of these positions. Indeed, the grammar of the sentence suggests that “Consociation” does not itself sustain them but rather makes it possible “that they may” sustain each other. It is a significant if subtle distinction because it prevents us from reading “Consociation” as a means to a single, self-interested end. Sustenance is but one effect of the principle that sets these two fields of discourse in dialogue and allows them to become more, and more secure, in consociation than they would be individually. By bringing the knowledge of literary study to bear upon other spheres and, in turn, allowing those other spheres to impinge upon literary study, critical charity makes possible the kind of fruitful consociation described in this passage. That is, charity serves not only to define the critic by occasioning metacritical distinctions; it also serves to establish the cultural relevance of criticism by fusing connections.

Jonson roots such connections in language itself. As the “Instrument of *Society*” (*Disc.* 1882-3), it is the function of language to bind together individuals and individual institutions in a network of discursive relationships. If it binds us together, however, what Jonson describes as the reflective capacity of language prevents homogenization: “*Language* most shewes a man: speake that I may see thee. It springs out of the most retired, and inmost parts of us, and is the Image of the Parent of it, the mind. No glasse renders a mans

forme, or likenesse, so true as his speech” (*Disc.* 2031-5). Our form, in the Aristotelian sense of the quality without which we would not be ourselves, inheres in the language we use. The same is true of the places we inhabit, for “Some [words] are of the Campe, some of the Councell-board, some of the Shop, some of the Sheepe-coat, some of the Pulpit, some of the Barre, &c.” (*Disc.* 1893-5). To exchange words is thus to trade in individual selves and fields of discourse. This idea anticipates the thought of such philosophers as Ludwig Wittgenstein, who perceived language inevitably partaking of the same logic that structures ontological “states of affairs,” and Mikhail Bakhtin, who perceived language as inevitably dialogically implicated in the specific social circumstances from which it arises. Regardless of the particular content of our utterances, when we speak, we represent or “imitate” our social environment: “Wheresoever, manners, and fashions are corrupted, Language is. It imitates the publicke riot. The excesse of Feasts, and apparell, are the notes of a sick State; and the wantonnesse of language, of a sick mind” (*Disc.* 954-8).

Jonson’s sense that our language inevitably says more than we do leads him to pursue the various implications of his own words down avenues of consociation. It is this practice, for instance, that yields his alignment of moral and critical criteria. In the preface to *Volpone*, he posits, with Strabo, “the impossibility of any mans being the good Poet, without first being a good man” (22-3).²³ More than just a valorization of the poet, this claim

²³ That is, an early and commonly cited articulation of the idea can be found in Strabo’s *Geographica*, a 17-volume *summa* of geographical knowledge dating from the first-century BC. Strabo there distinguishes excellence in blacksmiths and carpenters from excellence in poets: “for their excellence depends upon no inherent nobility and dignity, whereas the excellence of a poet is inseparably associated with the excellence of the man himself, and it is impossible for one to become a good poet unless he has previously become a good man” (1.2.5, tr. Jones). Quintilian borrowed from Cato the Elder his famous definition of the orator: “Let the orator whom I propose to form, then, be such a one as is characterized by the definition of Marcus Cato, *a good man skilled in speaking*” (12.1.1, tr. Butler). Spingarn also finds the idea in Minturno’s *De Poeta* (1559): “The poet is defined as a good man in speaking and skilled in imitating ... In which definition that which is placed first, and by the same nature is chief, thus seems to me of principal importance, that not only is it proper that he who

considerably broadens the scope and steepens the implications of literary criticism. For it places moral authority – that is, the authority to distinguish good men from bad – in the hands of the critic, and, as Jonson observes in the *Discoveries*, “they are ever good men, that must make good the times: if the men be naught, the times will be such” (247-8). Traversing this same avenue in the opposite direction in the Cary-Morison Ode, Jonson makes ethical behavior a matter of properly structuring the “lines of life” (64) and moral judgment a matter of textual criticism. Such consociation permits Jonson simultaneously to fulfill the roles of poet, critic, and “priest” (82). What it costs the critic in specialization by compromising the specificity of that role, it pays out in increased authority and cultural relevance.

Another avenue leads Jonson in the *Discoveries* to discuss at length (1509-85) Plutarch’s dictum, derived from Simonides, *Poema pictura loquens, pictura poema silens*: “It was excellently said of *Plutarch*, *Poetry* was a speaking Picture, and *Picture* a mute Poesie” (1510-2). The truly discursive nature of Jonson’s interest in consociation comes through as an extended comparison of poetry and painting shifts to an excursus on painting itself, culminating in a list of the most “famous” painters of Renaissance Italy. Jonson values consociation not only for what it can teach him, or others, about his own craft but also for its capacity to lead him beyond his own craft with critical authority intact. He follows Quintilian in applying the wisdom of the “Countrey-husband-man” to education and criticism (*Disc.* 1780-7). He observes that the preference of “the *Vulgar*” for “newnesse” over “goodnesse” dictates their taste in fencers, players, and preachers as well as poets (*Disc.* 405-9). And he consistently relates his practice as a reader, critic, and poet to the various parts and processes of the human body, whether through “biological metaphors” that seek to “[regulate] and [legitimate] criticism” (Burt 58-9) or through the alignment of “alimentary

would be a poet should be a good man, but that indeed he is not going to be a poet unless he is a good man” (qtd. in Spingarn, *Essays*, 1.221; my translation).

and literary behavior” (Boehrer 39). Unlike the itemizing sentences of this paragraph, however, Jonson does not limit consociative criticism to a dialogue between two fields of discourse. In one particularly striking example, the idea that “mens eminence appears but in their owne way” leads him from literary criticism (“*Virgils* felicity left him in prose”) to human “bodies” (“One can wrastle well; another runne well”) to “other creatures” (“some dogs are for the Deere”) to oratory (*Disc.* 846-83). The steps in this discursive itinerary amount to something more than allusions, metaphors, or illustrations; they are individual nodes in a network of consociation.

Lest we be tempted to chalk such gestures up to rhetoric, however, we need only to remind ourselves of Jonson’s demonstrated investment in discretion and his wariness with regard to metaphor. Jonson advises the reader of the *Discoveries* that metaphor or “Translation ... must only serve necessity ... or commodity, which is a kind of necessity; that is, when wee either absolutely want a word to expresse by ... or when we have not so fit a word” (1898-1903). He goes on to warn against the potential threat metaphor poses to the maintenance of decorum, as “when the person fetcheth his translations from a wrong place. As if a Privie-Counsellor should at the Table take his *Metaphore* from a Dicing-house, or Ordinary, or a Vintners Vault” (1906-9). This passage presents metaphor as a powerful but dangerous last resort and hardly accounts for Jonson’s relation of Cicero to a cart horse (846-83). Moreover, it represents only one of Jonson’s safeguards against the dissolution of rhetorical boundaries. Elsewhere, in a more expressly critical context, he makes a distinction between eloquence “in the *Schooles*, or in the *Hall*” and eloquence “at the *Barre*, or in the *Pulpi*” (*Disc.* 424-5). To level the criterion of eloquence across these categories would be to invite critical error: “I would no more chuse a *Rhetorician*, for reigning in a *Schoole*; then I would a *Pilot*, for rowing in a Pond” (436-37).

Jonson pursues consociation not in a rhetorical flight of fancy nor in a momentary lapse of discretion but in pursuit of generating a particular kind of knowledge and realizing a particular idea of the critic. We can glimpse that idea in critical heroes such as Cordatus, who reads *Every Man out of his Humour* through a philosophical conception of envy, thus validating and extending the cultural reach of Jonson's work and furnishing the philosophical tradition he draws upon with a valuable illustration (1.3.146-98). Following Heinsius, Jonson praises Aristotle for his efforts toward the unification of knowledge, pronouncing him "the first accurate *Criticke*, and truest Judge; nay, the greatest *Philosopher*, the world ever had: for, hee notes the vices of all knowledges, in all creatures, and out of many mens perfections in a Science, hee formed still one Art" (*Disc.* 2511-5). Heinsius aside, the same criterion made Jonson a great admirer of Francis Bacon and his *Novum Organum* (1620), which "openeth all defects of Learning, whatsoever" (*Disc.* 935-6). Like Bacon, Jonson proposed from a literary critical perspective to "calmely study the separation of opinions" in search of "the consonancy, and concatenation of Truth" (2107-15). His description of this process recalls Bacon's pyramid of learning: "This is *Monte potiri*, to get the hill. For no perfect Discovery can bee made upon a flat or a levell" (2122-4).

Jonson insists that the scholar possess "an universall store in himselfe" (*Disc.* 75) and that the poet undertake "a multiplicity of reading" (*Disc.* 2484). The rambling variety of the *Discoveries* and the wide-ranging contents of Jonson's personal library, as inventoried by Herford and the Simpsons (1.250-71, 11.593-609), suggest that he made these goals his own. In an early dedicatory poem appended to Thomas Palmer's *The Sprite of Trees and Herbes* (c. 1598-9), a book of botanical emblems, Jonson provides a tantalizing glimpse of how he experienced reading:

thus, as a ponderous thinge in water cast
extendeth circles into infinits,

still making that the greatest that is last
 till th'one hath drown'd the other in our sightes,
 So in my braine; the stronge impression
 of thy rich labors worlds of thoughts created,
 which thoughts being circumvol[v]d in gyerlyk mocion
 wear spent with wonder as they weare delated,
 till giddie with amazement I fell downe
 in a deepe trance

(17-26)

In these thrilling lines, the boundaries that divide botany from other fields of discourse dissolve as the ripples of Jonson's consociative thought expand, redouble, and tumble over each other in "gyerlyk mocion." Jonson expresses in metaphor the frenzy of synaptic activity triggered by Palmer's work in a mind that undertook reading as a richly discursive activity. Consociation makes possible this kind of experience, just as it makes possible the symbiosis of scholar and prince. It makes Palmer's emblems matter deeply to Jonson, just as it makes poetry matter to power. In *Poetaster*, Caesar claims to honor poetry only when it is "True borne, and nurst with all the sciences" (5.1.20).

The nasutus, Jonson's idea of the true and proper critic, dives into the midst of this network of fluid consociative thought, engaging an interdisciplinary cross-flow of discursive ideas as well as a tumult of contrary opinions and judgments. "Among diverse opinions of an Art," Jonson writes in the *Discoveries*, "and most of them contrary in themselves, it is hard to make election; and therefore, though a man cannot invent new things after so many, he may doe a welcome worke yet to helpe posterity to judge rightly of the old" (1762-7). Scholars have often, and often persuasively, read Jonson's criticism as a more or less self-interested apologia for his works and prop for his authorial identity.²⁴ Yet this description of the role of the critic clearly emphasizes mediation between "Art" (the craft or τέχνη of

²⁴ See, for instance, Dutton and Cannan, pp. 19-31.

poetry), “diverse opinions” (criticism itself), and, most crucially, “posterity.” The final step along any avenue of critical consociation, and the fruition of critical charity, is to make the knowledge of criticism useful or “welcome” to the individual reader. This vision of the critic is particularly apparent in the posthumously published *Discoveries*, where, as Jennifer Brady has observed, “a distinctive Jonson is emerging: a reader, teacher, and guide less invested in amassing intellectual riches for his own use than in examining the legacy he had inherited and was disseminating to his successors” (16).

This point, however, must not be made at the expense of Jonson’s inconsistency. We search in vain for any kind of resolution or culmination in the *Discoveries*. The “distinctive Jonson” that Brady sees emerging there continues to negotiate, with an inconsistent degree of clarity and success, a symposium of critical voices, “and most of them contrary in themselves.” What I have attempted to suggest with this study of Jonson’s criticism is that at least part of that inconsistency might be attributed to an idea of the critic as a self-contained symposium, a cultural agent who on behalf of the individual reader or “posterity” engages an often chaotic and sometimes fortuitously harmonious clamor of voices arising from various disciplines and expressing various ideas and opinions. Jonson contains this variety without always controlling it. The *Conversations*, for instance, often presents us with Jonson as a polyposus of opinion, as when he recollects beating Marston (160) or gossips about Sidney’s acne (230-2) or Daniel’s jealousy (152). The lapse reveals the difficulty of maintaining balance and discretion in the surging consociative stream, where the possibility that Sidney’s acne might have some critical significance is charitably allowed. If consociation presented Jonson with irresistible benefits, by entertaining it he ran the risk of becoming preposterously transchanged himself and unraveling into a critical Volpone.²⁵ It is

²⁵ On Jonson’s understanding of the benefits and liabilities of adaptability, see Maus, pp. 40-6.

worth recalling, however, that Jonson makes Nasutus and the Author discrete interlocutors in the “Apologetical Dialogue.” Like Harvey and the other critics under study in these pages, Jonson often transcends his own performance in his design of the ideal critic. The idea takes shape independently of his ability to fulfill it.

To pursue the idea of the consociative critic through Jonson alone would be to misrepresent its discursive basis. The following section of this chapter therefore examines the idea, by way of Jonson, through a particular network of consociation that spidered out in the early modern period. It occurred to Jonson and other critics that their judgments, and what those judgments implied about the state of learning, arts, and culture in England, might have some bearing upon contemporary debates over the physical integrity of the world below, and ultimately above, the moon. They recognized that it was impossible within a consociative framework to argue either for decay or progress in the literary arts without making broader natural philosophic and moral implications. Moreover, others outside the field of criticism, such as it was, recognized this as well. In drawing upon criticism to advance arguments from other fields of discourse, such figures played an instrumental role in granting the idea of the critic definition, coherence, and cultural relevance. Being talked about proved just as essential to the invention of the critic as the metacritical discourse between critics themselves that has provided the subject matter of this dissertation.

III. “Now Things Daily Fall”

So far in this chapter, I have presented the criticism of Ben Jonson in a framework through which his much bruited inconsistency might be read as symptomatic of an idea of the critic as a deliberately discursive or “consociative” cultural agent. One topic on which that inconsistency is particularly pronounced is the question of decay versus progress, whether in terms of literature, human intellect, or nature itself. Here too, I will argue,

vacillation arises from consociation, for this question brought Jonson into dialogue with a great many other critics, poets, humanists, moralists, historians, and natural philosophers at odds over the physical integrity of the natural world.

Jonson's criticism regularly sounds a dour note of pessimism. As early as the humor plays, he inveighs, through his various dramatic stand-ins, against the "barren and infected age" (*EMi* 5.3.340) and "the monstrosnesse of [his] time" (*EMo*, "second Sounding," 66-72). Examples abound. The poor reception of the *New Inn*, for instance, inspires a bitter jeremiad against the "lothsome age" (2). What makes these pronouncements interesting, and helps them to transcend their self-serving function, is the historical context in which Jonson consistently couches them, bemoaning taste, custom, or the fickle opinion of the multitude not in themselves but as symptoms of a malady of time. Jonson found himself living at the end of history, and, as a poet, he felt he had suffered for it: "*Poetry*, in this latter Age, hath prov'd but a meane *Mistresse*, to such as have wholly addicted themselves to her, or given their names up to her family" (*Disc.* 622-4). His pessimism extends from literature to literary criticism, which, like poetry, is a factor of the "Age": "*Nothing* in our Age, I have observ'd, is more preposterous, then the *running Iudgements* upon *Poetry*, and *Poets*" (*Disc.* 587-8). Here too, the "times" are to blame. For the "times are ... growne, to be either partiall, or malitious" (*Disc.* 516-7). "[N]ow nothing is good that is naturall," and "false opinion grows strong against the best men" (*Disc.* 575-6, 604-5).

The gravity of these critical and metacritical observations is compounded by Jonson's consociation of moral and critical criteria. After all, in Jonsonian terms, a nation of bad poets comes dangerously close to a nation of bad men – or, to be more precise, a nation in literary decline indicates a nation in moral decline, and vice versa. At his most pessimistic, Jonson acknowledges these implications. The world appeared old and infirm to him, as it

did to many of his contemporaries. He calls the popular taste for slanderous satire “the disease of the Age: and no wonder,” he hastens to add, “if the world, growing old, begin to be infirme” (*Disc.* 300-1). Elsewhere, he ominously observes that “[n]ow things daily fall: wits grow downe-ward, and *Eloquence* growes back-ward” (*Disc.* 921-2). Consociation permits Jonson, as a critic, to provide an index of the world’s age and quality – of its position along a declining path leading to universal decay. He thus conscientiously adds his voice to the chorus of those convinced that it was the virtue of the physical matter of the fallen world to wear out to nothing and that the time had nearly come.

George Williamson, perhaps the first to note the influence of contemporary theories of decay on the literature of early modern England, observes toward the end of his seminal 1935 essay that this influence was so strong as to soak clear through poetry to the fresh canvas of English literary criticism.²⁶ Nearly a century later, this loose end remains right where Williamson left it. Yet the present context demands that we pick it up, for behind Williamson’s peripheral observation lies an intricate and crowded network of consociation. The idea that all things were daily falling as the world collectively wore out to nothing provided otherwise far-flung fields of discourse with a common cause for concern. John Donne maps out the resulting network in his “First Anniversary” (1611), where the contemporary state of nutrition, sexuality, magic, and natural philosophy all point to decay. The topic led critics of the period toward historiography and natural philosophy just as precipitously as it led historiographers and natural philosophers toward criticism. Ultimately, however, the theory of decay proves inimical to the developmental urges of early modern English criticism – to its tendency to figure the poetic legacy of England as an upward arc and poetry itself as resilient nature, impervious to decay if not to abuse. Hopeful champions

²⁶ "Mutability, Decay, and Seventeenth-Century Melancholy," *ELH* 2.2 (1935), 121-50.

of methodized poetic praxis such as Jonson recognized, by virtue of consociation, that universal decay stood between poetry and progress and, in response, began to seek out ways around it.

The relationship between decay and criticism goes back to the first century AD, when, as George Kennedy has shown, Latin and Greek writers alike began to express concern over the decline of eloquence.²⁷ Kennedy identifies *On Sublimity* (c. C1 AD) as the source of one of the first, if not the first, of such discussions. There, in the forty-fourth chapter, we find “Longinus” debating the cause of the present paucity of literary genius with a nameless philosopher. This philosopher wonders whether peace and the waning of democracy are to blame, but “Longinus” confidently replies that it is not politics but rather the love of money and of pleasure that have weakened the literary will. Seneca the Elder (c. 54 BC-39 AD), in the *Controversiae*, similarly blames luxury for the decline of eloquence but, contrary to “Longinus,” a would-be reformer, Seneca associates the downward slope with the natural tendency of all things to decay. Petronius (c. 27-66 AD), in an ironic dialogue from the *Satiricon*, blames education – or perhaps just pokes fun at what had become a clichéd topic of conversation. By linking the decline of eloquence to other cultural shortcomings and, in the case of Seneca, to a theory of universal decay, such discussions open up avenues of consociation between rhetoric, criticism, and other fields of discourse. They pave the way for Jonson by suggesting that the moral status of a given culture might be gauged through the critical evaluation of its writers and orators.

The most comprehensive account of the transition in England from a historical perspective based upon decay to one based upon progress spans two books, Victor Harris’s *All Coherence Gone* (1949) and Ernest Lee Tuveson’s *Millennium and Utopia* (1949). For

²⁷ See Kennedy, *Art*, pp. 446-64 and 515-26. The following sentences summarize Kennedy’s account.

Tuveson, the history of the theory of decay is the history of the reception of the Book of Revelation. By his account, Luther resurrected this marginalized text with a new allegorical interpretation that patched the hole torn in church history by the Protestant Reformation by locating the peaceful thousand-year binding of Satan (the millennium) in the past, identifying the Pope as the Antichrist and the Protestants as the beleaguered chosen people, and proposing the imminence of the apocalypse (24-30). Protestants found further support for this revised historical perspective in the writings of St. Cyprian, the third-century Bishop of Carthage whose writings lament a world grown old.

Harris attributes the widespread English acceptance of the theory of decay at the outset of the seventeenth century to the confluence of an increased attention to nature on the part of natural philosophy and an increased attention to sin on the part of Puritanism (93-106). Phenomena such as the nova of 1572 and the sunspots observed by Galileo in 1611 provided decayists with irrefutable evidence of the extension of man's original sin to all corners of creation. Yet these same events, when considered as scientific achievements, also provided irrefutable evidence of unprecedented progress in the arts that troubled decayists and their assertions. It was this very conflict that ultimately laid the theory of decay to rest as an exponential accretion of scientific achievements gradually outweighed the despair of decay with hope for artistic progress. In addition to hope, however, it was the rejection of an anthropocentric, geocentric universe by natural philosophers such as Bacon and Galileo that made the idea of man's sin extending to nature untenable. The Caroline era saw the Lutheran model of history inverted by Millenarians like Joseph Mede and Henry More, who shifted the millennium back to the future and traded Cyprianic gloom for a pious investment in the advancement of learning.

Godfrey Goodman's *The Fall of Man* (1616, 1618, 1629) and the third edition of George Hakewill's *An Apology of the Power and Providence of God* (1627, 1630, 1635), which features a side-by-side, point-by-point refutation of Goodman's argument, respectively mark for Harris the apotheosis and the swan-song of the theory of decay. Goodman, chaplain to the queen and soon to be bishop of Gloucester, followed medieval precedent in extending the Fall to nature but advanced decayism by extending a continual and cumulative decay to the heavens. Appealing to teleological reason and a wealth of empirical evidence, he aims to portray a world drawing ever nearer to an inevitable purgative apocalypse and, with this portrait, to redirect the thoughts of Christian souls from nature to God, from corruption to incorruptibility.

Hakewill, onetime chaplain to James I, boldly refuted Goodman, whom he recognized as the voice of the majority, with a simple distinction between change and decay. Nature changes, he argues, but change is not decay. Providence maintains the constancy of nature by fastidiously balancing corruption with generation. This thesis yields a cyclical model of history indebted to Jean Bodin,²⁸ Louis Leroy,²⁹ and Francis Bacon but unique in Hakewill's expression of it – most of all for its instability. He places control of the pace at which cultures cycle through generation and corruption in the hands of free-willed humanity, which allows him to deflect decayist shot from nature to manners. Industry is generative, decadence corruptive. If – and this proves to be a very big *if* – we have lost the learning and

²⁸ In Book 4.1 of *Les Six livres de la République* (1576), Bodin presents an anthropomorphic theory of states, which are born, mature, and die just like their human constituents.

²⁹ *De la vicissitude* (1575) (translated into English by Robert Ashley in 1594) celebrates the almost infinite variety of God's creation and provides an exhaustive providential recuperation of change. Leroy inoculates the vicissitude or "uncertain changing" (*OED*) of things by linking lower change with higher causes: sublunary change depends upon time, which in turn depends upon celestial motion, which in turn depends upon God, the first mover.

virtue of those who came before us, we have only “our owne *sloth*” and “the malice and faintnes of our *owne wills*” to blame (A3^v).

Hakewill endorses the generative power of industry by adducing evidence of progress within the arts (e.g., “*Printing, Gunnes, and the Sea-Card or Marinnners Compasse ... comparable both for use and skill to the best of the Ancients*” [312]), but this tactic proves just as poisonous to his cyclical model as it is to Luther’s Cyprianic. Art, it seems, loves an upward arc. Intimations of cumulative progress sneak their way into his measured claims of equal footing with the ancients: “And if we descend to a particular examination of the severall professions, *Arts, Sciences, and Manufactures*, wee shall surely finde the prediction of the *Divine Seneca* accomplished, *Multa venientis avi populus nobis sciet*, the people of future ages shall come to the knowledge of many things unknowne to us” (261).³⁰ Seneca the Younger was right about the future and right about learning. By translating this observation into his own language and applying it to his own time, Hakewill balances due reverence for the ancients with an acknowledgement of learning as a cumulative process. He offers historical evidence in support of this idea ten pages later when he celebrates the perfection of the calendar as a collaborative project shared across time and space by Meton of Athens,³¹ Julius Caesar, Aloysius Lilius,³² and others (278-9).

Hakewill’s exhaustive search for progress in the “wits and arts” in the third book of the *Apology* eventually leads him to poetry, though by no direct or plotted path. The topic had already been introduced in the first book as the seed of the theory of decay: “I am

³⁰ That would be Seneca the Younger (4 BC-65 AD), not his decayist predecessor, in his *Naturales Quaestiones* 7.30.5.

³¹ Greek mathematician and astronomer of the fifth century BC who briefly appears onstage in Aristophanes *The Birds*, his hands full of surveying instruments.

³² Italian doctor and philosopher (1510-1576) who devised the Gregorian calendar.

perswaded that the *fictions* of *Poets* was it which first gave life unto it” (25). Specifically, Hakewill is thinking of the old Attic yarn of the four ages of man, a simple allegory that somewhere along the line was mistaken for truth to the great detriment of Hakewill and his contemporaries. It is likely with Goodman in mind that he defends Plato’s suspicion of poets (and Moses’ of painters and sculptors), who “corrupt the truth with lyes, and deceive credulous mindes by those representations which are presented to their eyes” (235). With these risks and unfortunate associations on the table – and considering that artistic progress is somewhat less readily discernible in poetry than in, say, the compass, which the ancients altogether lacked – it is surprising that Hakewill should include poetry in his survey at all. But he does, stating in the chapter heading his intention to demonstrate “*that poetry as other arts hath fallen and risen againe in this latter age*” (287). The result is a remarkable instance of consociative criticism. As the chapter heading indicates, Hakewill continues to write in defense (apologia) of a cyclical view of history. But within the chapter, he dallies with another literary mode, one familiar to him through Scaliger’s *Poetices* (1561), and his invocation of that mode in the context of his defense carries implications that reconfigure the functions of both. At the most basic level, it implies that the critical evaluation of poetry has historiographic bearing, that a comprehensive defense of a given model of history, which is for Hakewill, first and foremost, a moral enterprise, must include a statement of poetics – in sum, that moral, historical, and critical perspectives all determine each other.

Noticeably uneasy judging the merits of poetry on his own, Hakewill appeals to the authority of Horace, Martial, Scaliger, Du Bartas, and a handful of other ancient and modern critics, quilting them into a cohesive whole that boldly endorses poetic progress. He places modern poetry on a par with ancient, singling out Sidney’s *Arvadia* as “nothing inferiour to the choisest peece among the Ancients” (287). He skeptically inquires with Horace whether

time betters poems as it does wine and reverently instances the preference of Scaliger (“whom a man may safely compare with any of the ancients, and preferre before many of them”) for Latin over Greek and Virgil over Homer, but not without a resolutely optimistic caveat: “Yet if I should match *Virgill* himselfe with *Ariosto* or *Torquato Tasso* in *Italian*, *Bartas* in *French*, or *Spencer* in *English*, I thinke I should not much wrong him” (290). Ariosto answers Virgil as Spenser answers Chaucer as Du Bartas answers Ronsard, each poet demonstrating at very least the endurance of the literary arts in modern times and quite possibly their advancement. For Hakewill, the idea that both “*virtues and vices*” and “*Arts and Sciences*” suffer “revolutions and returns” (40) serves as a principle of consociation. The debate over decay thus drives and authorizes him to engage in the judgment of poetry just as it drives and authorizes such arbiters of English taste as Campion, Daniel, Drayton, and Jonson to engage in historiography. A defense of providence, like a defense of poetry, must establish the endurance of nature, the endurance of humanity, and the endurance of a harmonic interaction between the two.

Bacon himself set historiography and criticism in dialogue, and in doing so may have provided Hakewill with more than just a cyclical model of history. His path to poetry, however, is more direct than Hakewill’s. He divides his critical survey of human learning in the second book of *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) into three parts corresponding to Galen’s tripartite division of the human brain: poesy (imagination), philosophy (reason), and history (memory). Like Sidney and other theorists of mimesis, Bacon bases his definition of poetry upon the interaction of nature and the imitative human imagination, which “may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed, and sever that which nature hath joined”

(186).³³ Rooting poetry in nature provides Bacon with a plausible explanation for its historical and geographical ubiquity:

And we see that by these insinuations and congruities with man's nature and pleasure, joined also with the agreement and consort it hath with music, it hath had access and estimation in rude times and barbarous regions, where other learning stood excluded For being as a plant that cometh of the lust of the earth, without a formal seed, it hath sprung up and spread abroad more than any other kind [of learning].

(187-8)

Indeed, in this metaphor it becomes difficult to distinguish poetry from nature at all. Both appear timeless and universal. Bacon's attempt to attribute these qualities to poetry with reference to its naturalness reflexively makes a case for the constancy of nature on the basis of sustained poetic production throughout history. To maintain that ancient forms of poetry "retain much life and vigor" (187) is effectively to argue that even as the formal surface of poetry changes, something more essential to it endures. Poetry's natural essence makes it impervious to decay or deficiency, which Bacon makes perfectly clear in the expanded survey of *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623):

[poetry] is, as we have said before, as a *Luxuriant Herb brought forth without seed, and springs up from the strength and ranknesse of the soyle. Wherefore it runs along every where, and is so amply spread, as it were a superfluous labour to be curious of any DEFICIENTS therein.*³⁴

The "lust of the earth" and the "strength and rankness of the soil" – the untrammelled fecundity of nature, taken for granted by Bacon, that makes poetry immortal – is precisely what's at stake in the Goodman-Hakewill debate.

Bacon further reveals the bearing of literary matters upon historiography in his famous account of the origins of humanism. In the first book of the *Advancement of Learning*, he

³³ All citations of Bacon, unless otherwise noted, refer to Bacon, *Major Works*.

³⁴ From the Watts translation of 1640, *Of the advancement and proficience of learning or the partitions of sciences IX bookes* (London: 1640; STC 1167.3), p. 264.

neatly traces the affected Ciceronianism of Carr and Ascham back to Luther, who found in the wisdom of antiquity an ally against Rome: “This by consequence did draw on a necessity of more exquisite travail in the languages original wherein those authors did write [a]nd thereof grew again a delight in their manner of style and phrase” (138). The rhetorical and grammatical study of the ancients by Luther’s inheritors “grew speedily to an excess; for men began to hunt more after words than matter” (139). For Bacon, this thumbnail history serves chiefly as an illustration of “the first distemper of learning, when men study words and not matter” (139). Yet he acknowledges its broader historiographic implications, for though he has presented the rise and fall of humanist learning “as an example of late times, yet it hath been and will be ‘secundum majus et minus’ in all time” (139). That is, he acknowledges that this individual account serves a parabolic function by illustrating with a specific example a general pattern of progress and decay, advancement and regression or perversion, that occurs cyclically at the hands of humanity, not providence, throughout “all time.” Bacon thus provides Jonson and others with a learned basis for a conception of language and literary taste as a reflection of cultural development. The case becomes even clearer when we consider that this parable supplies a deficiency identified by Bacon in book two. No one, he there observes, has hitherto attempted “a just story of learning, containing the antiquities and originals of knowledges, and their sects; their inventions, their traditions; their diverse administrations and managings; *their flourishings, their oppositions, decays, depressions, oblivions, removes*; with the causes and occasions of them, and all other events concerning learning, throughout the ages of the world” (176, my emphasis). Individually and collectively, the “ages of the world” presented to Bacon the same “revolutions and returns” with which Hakewill redeemed the constancy of nature, a cyclical model of history endorsed as forcefully by “a just story of learning” as it is by the phenomena of nature.

While Bacon was planning *The Advancement of Learning*, Thomas Campion and Samuel Daniel were engaged in a debate over the fate of English poetry and what that fate implied about the shape of history and the moral and artistic standing of England. Despite their differences, the two sides of the debate have in common a great hope for English poetry. For to project what English poetry can, should, or will be, as both Campion and Daniel do, is at the very least to grant the possibility of progress and to place that potential in the hands of poets. Adopting a cyclical historical perspective, Campion campaigns for the restoration of poetry to its classical greatness through the proscription of rhyme and the reinstatement of quantitative meter and classical forms. His treatise is an attempt to demonstrate the suitability of English to these reforms, and his endearing enthusiasm for the idea of England as the potential redeemer of poetry is impossible to miss: “What honour were it then for our English language to be the first that after so many yeares of barbarisme could second the perfection of the industrious *Greekes* and *Romaines*?” (Smith 2.332). Campion proves that classicism and decayism are not one and the same. Locating the apotheosis of poetry in the classical past does not in the least inhibit his commitment to progress within a cyclical framework or his sense of himself as an innovator and of his project as one “*never before this time by any man attempted*” (Smith 2.327). He places himself at the uppermost end of an upward arc of history that begins with Erasmus and the redemption of learning from its deformed state in the Middle Ages.

Like Campion, Samuel Daniel understands poetry as an ideal abstracted from individual poems and impervious to decay. From this perspective, bad poets do not disturb the dignity of poetry itself “nor keep backe the reputation of excellencies” (Smith 2.364). Yet Daniel is more doggedly progressive than Campion and answers the classicism of his adversary with a relativistic kind of pluralism. Where Campion sees a thousand years of

deformed learning after the fall of Rome, Daniel sees the sage laws of the Goths and the wisdom of Bede (Smith 2.368-70). He resists the cyclical paradigm that presents the history of learning, or of poetry, as so much evolution and devolution. Beyond naturalizing poetry, he naturalizes the fluctuations of taste that look to Campion like deformity, placing them beyond the reach of critical judgment:

Time and the turne of things bring about these faculties according to the present estimation Nor can it be but a touch of arrogant ignorance, to hold this or that nation Barbarous, these or those times grosse, considering how this manifold creature man, wheresoever hee stand in the world, hath always some disposition of worth, intertaines the order of societie, affects that which is most in use, and is eminent in some thing or another, that fits his humour and the times.

(Smith 2.367)

Taste is not to be manufactured, but rather accommodated; nature, through its agent custom, ratifies rhyme. By natural standards, English poetry is nothing inferior to Greek, for “[w]e are the children of nature as well as they” (Smith 2.366-7), and “[accent] being more certain and more resounding, works that effect of motion with as happy successe as either the Greek or Latin” (Smith 2.360). Daniel’s poetics yield a purer yet less qualitative idea of progress than either Bacon’s or Hakewill’s, for he trades the waxing and waning of cyclical history for unqualified mutability. His nature is neither winding up nor winding down but simply moving on. The implications of Hakewill’s consociation of historiography and literary criticism are here borne out from the other direction, leading Daniel, as a critic, to make overarching claims about history, nature, and epistemology: “There is but one learning, which *omnes gentes habent scriptum in cordibus suis* [all men have written upon their hearts]” (Smith 2.372). Critical and historical perspectives determine each other as the *Defence of Ryme* becomes a defense of nature’s constancy: “The distribution of giftes are universall, and all seasons hath them in some sort” (Smith 2.371).

Perhaps the most salient product of the consociation of criticism and historiography, and its mutually determined endorsement of progress, is the evolution of the Elizabethan roll call into the Stuart era. Between Sidney and Suckling, this trope increasingly presents a linear and developmental picture of history, and thus the desire to formally establish an English poetic legacy serves the interests of progressivism. While Sidney's spotty if fundamental list amounts to little more than a statement of personal taste – "I account the *Mirror of Magistrates* meetly furnished of beautiful parts" (*Misc. Works*, 112) – by the time Suckling writes his imitation of Boccalini's *Ragguagli di Parnaso* (1612) in "A Sessions of the Poets" (1637), the threat of decay has been disarmed by Bacon and Hakewill and the poetic legacy of England has been firmly established by English critics, leaving it impervious to the claims of taste and open to satire. Suckling's sending up of Jonson, Carew, Davenant, and the tradition they represent demonstrates the ability of that tradition to take a licking, an ability owed to the consolidation of English poetic history in the work of Suckling's critical forbears.

With his "censure" of English poetry in the first book of *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), George Puttenham considerably expands and enriches the roll call from its diminutive stature in Sidney's manuscript. Beyond merely expressing his own judgment, he intends to demonstrate that "many of our countrymen have painfully travailed in this part" and to ensure that the best of them "should not be defrauded of such honor as seemeth due to them for having by their thankful studies so much beautified our English tongue" (147). Though he awards Chaucer, Lydgate, Gower, and Hardyng "first place" for their antiquity, the names that follow – Wyatt, Surrey, Heywood, Phaer, Golding, Sidney, Raleigh, Dyer – express an unmistakable trend of progress, granting readers a sense of the development of English poetry and the consequential refinement of the English language (147-51).

Puttenham presents English poetry as a coherent whole, a solid and identifiable thing that can be turned over in the hand and studied. Meanwhile, his commentary and prioritization of certain contributions over others indicates the simultaneous progressive development of critical discretion. His “censure” establishes the importance of poetry to English and England and the importance of criticism to facilitating and enhancing the contributions of poetry.³⁵

It is this last consideration that encourages critics less suited to literary judgment than Sidney to offer comment on the state of English poetry: “My judgment is nothing at all in Poems, or Poesie,” confesses Edmund Bolton in 1618, “and therefore I dare not go far, but will simply deliver my Mind concerning those Authours among us, whose *English* hath in my Conceit most propriety, and is nearest to the Phrase of Court” (1.109-10).³⁶ While Bolton’s criteria clearly differ from those of Puttenham, his version of the roll call is no less effective at consolidating the history of English poetry and promoting the idea of artistic progress, which he sees most clearly “in that vital, judicious, and most practicable language of *Benjamin Jonson’s Poems*” (1.111). Henry Peacham makes these intimations of progress explicit in *The Complete Gentleman* (1622) by defending poetry from the taint of decay: “But while we looke backe to antiquitie, let us not forget our later and moderne times (as imagining nature hath heretofore extracted her quintessence and left us the dregges), which produce as fertile wits as perhaps the other; yea, and in our *Brittaine*” (1.128-9). Approaching criticism as a mode of courtesy, he provides the would-be complete gentleman with a condensed history of English poetry and a Hakewillian reminder of the dignity of “later and moderne times” in the form of a roll call of English poets spanning from Chaucer to the “golden Age” of Elizabethan

³⁵ On Puttenham and pragmatism, see pp. 112-5 above.

³⁶ All citations in this paragraph refer to Spingarn, ed., *Essays*.

poetry (1.133). Michael Drayton follows suit five years later in his verse epistle to Henry Reynolds. Like Peacham, Drayton figures Chaucer as a primitive English genius, but he exceeds even Peacham's English pride by comparing Spenser to Homer and claiming that Sandys' Ovid overshadows the original (1.136-9). Sidney plays the role of Bacon in Drayton's account, redeeming "plenteous *English*" (1.136) from the pervasive and unexamined influence of John Lyly. These roll calls collectively serve at once to stabilize the idea of English poetry and to reconfigure contemporary historical perspectives, optimistically endorsing the possibility of upward progress and placing the agency of that progress securely in the hands of poets and critics.

This brief tour of the various consociative channels running between criticism and the debate over decay in early modern England has prepared us to grasp more fully the tensions and contexts that underlie and surround Jonson's inconsistency on this topic. It explains, for instance, why his most pessimistic critical pronouncement – "Now things daily fall" – should follow immediately upon his most optimistic: "*Cicero* is said to bee the only wit, that the people of *Rome* had equall'd to their *Empire* We have had many, and in their severall Ages" (*Disc.* 899-901). Jonson follows this astonishing statement of England's intellectual and artistic superiority to Rome with his own contribution to the roll call, joining his critical predecessors and contemporaries in consolidating and celebrating English literary tradition by pronouncing the names of More, Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney, Hooker, Raleigh, et al. The list culminates with one "who hath fill'd up all numbers; and perform'd that in our tongue, which may be compar'd, or preferr'd, either to insolent *Greece*, or haughty *Rome*" (916-8). This "*marke*, and *ακμή*" (923) of the English language is none other than Francis Bacon, the great English prophet of progress. Jonson had introduced Bacon a page earlier, praising him in the dewy terms of a nostalgic old timer, a man whose time has passed: "there

hapn'd, in my time, one noble *Speaker*, who was full of gravity in his speaking.... The feare of every man that heard him, was, lest hee should make an end" (886-98). But he did make an end, and after him, things began to fall. Jonson's abrupt shift from progressive roll-calling to decayist doom-saying evokes a Baconian sense of the cyclical rise and fall of the human arts and sciences in all ages, a process in which Bacon, like Luther, plays an ironic role.

Critical consociation wedges Jonson between a pessimistic assessment of the state of learning and letters in his "age" and cognizance of the implications of that pessimism in other fields of discourse. Inconsistency arises as the critical authority that generates his pessimism collides with a hope for progress stemming in large part from his investment in the humanist program of education underwriting his critical authority. He writes at length on liberal education in the *Discoveries*, consistently betraying a confidence in methodized poetic praxis limited only by individual nature. For poets are made not by "nature" alone but also "by exercise, by imitation, by Studie" (2404-5). And if there is "no attempting" to "make straight" that which is naturally crooked (36-8), the power of study to benefit those suited to it affords simple and direct expression: "For a man to write well, there are required three Necessaries. To reade the best Authors, observe the best Speakers: and much exercise of his owne style" (1697-9). Jonson saw such hopes realized in the great English poets, orators, scholars, and humanists of previous generations, men such as More, Elyot, Sidney, Bacon, and his own teacher at the Westminster School, William Camden. It is therefore fitting that his most unequivocal statement of faith in the endurance of nature despite the shortcomings of his age should be made by way of translating the Spanish humanist Juan Luis Vives. "I cannot thinke *Nature* is so spent, and decay'd, that she can bring forth nothing worth her former yeares," he writes in the *Discoveries*. "She is alwayes the same, like

her selfe: And when she collects her strength, is abler still. Men are decay'd, and *studies*: Shee is not" (124-8).

If things daily fall now, they are not, it seems, daily falling always. Like Galileo's telescope, which curiously contradicts the decay it reveals with the very means used to reveal it, even the most pessimistic assessments of Jonson's criticism are redemptive in the sense that they measure the abuses of poets and other critics by optimistic standards of poetic and critical virtue, standards that stood as a model to the many sons of Ben from Carew to Dryden. Expressions of hope, like expressions of pessimism, emerge in a historical context, but they shift Jonson's attention from the infection of the present to the promise of posterity. "I take this labour in teaching others," he writes in the *Discoveries*, "that they should not be alwayes to be taught Yet with this purpose, rather to shew the right way to those that come after, then to detect any that have slipt before by error, and I hope it will bee more profitable" (1755-61). Ultimately, Jonson's hope for the potential of criticism to profit those that come after, and the incompatibility of that hope with a vision of the world in which things daily fall, rescues the whole world from decay, if only by sustaining the inconsistency of his criticism.

EPILOGUE: THE REINVENTION OF THE CRITIC

As is doubtless the case with the subject of any extended research project, the longer I work on the idea of the critic, the more important it seems. Beginning research on this topic in an era in which Americans were widely divided over the propriety of openly criticizing the presidential administration, with one side constituting its patriotism precisely through such criticism and the other constituting its patriotism precisely through opposition to it, was at once unfortunate and fortuitous. Later, my thinking on pedantry was doubtless affected by a presidential election staged, at moments, as a proxy war between “intellectuals” and “anti-intellectuals.” More specifically, I found my anxieties over the seemingly esoteric metacritical focus of this project assuaged time and again by the voice of popular culture. On its fringe, I found Louis Menand piecing together the idea of the critic through Lionel Trilling in *The New Yorker*,¹ a publication that weekly features a section entitled “The Critics,” and found Zadie Smith doing the same thing in *The New York Review of Books* through E. M. Forster.² The work that occupied me day and night made the tributes and various other responses written after the deaths of Jacques Derrida and William F. Buckley seem of a kind, all thoroughly metacritical, concerned with making sense of the way in which these writers had attempted to make sense of politics, art, and the rest of culture on our behalf. The specialized vocabulary of my dissertation read all the less so after I discovered a popular website called metacritic.com, which numerically quantifies and averages published reviews

¹ “Regrets Only: Lionel Trilling and His Discontents,” *The New Yorker* (September 29 2008), pp. 80-90.

² “E. M. Forster, Middle Manager,” *The New York Review of Books* (August 14 2008), pp. 8-12.

of books, films, music recordings, television shows, and video games. In a testament both to the weedy rapidity with which internet phenomena insinuate themselves into our culture and to the dominant contemporary function of criticism as a resource for consumers, I have since heard friends and relatives of all ages ask each other, before heading off to the multiplex, “How’d it do on Metacritic?”

Developments in the academy, as well, have given me reason to believe that the process of invention examined in this dissertation continues in our own era. To take just one recent example, Sean Keilen, in *Vulgar Eloquence* (2006), rides the current tide of defining proper critical practice against the waning influence of the New Historicism, a methodology that in attempting to restore historical context to literary analysis treats literature and discourse “as though they were identical in meaning” (6). “It would appear that in becoming everything,” Keilen observes of this trend, “literature also became nothing in particular” (7). Rather than prescribe an institutional return to an understanding of literature as a privileged category of expression, however, Keilen simply argues that “it is worthwhile for *some* literary critics to try to dislodge literature from the social and political contexts in which it was embedded, and in that way to lay foundations for different kinds of literary history” (11).

If I have done my job, Keilen’s place within the long history of the idea of the critic should be clear. In the twenty-first century, we find the critic continuing to grapple with the ramifications of determining the difference between literary art and other forms of discourse. From one perspective, the history of criticism can be seen as a sine wave plotted on the axes of time and the categorical privilege of literary art. Keilen cites Stephen Greenblatt’s argument that “what we call ideology ... Renaissance England called poetry” (11) as a means of negatively establishing his own critical identity. He answers Greenblatt as Greenblatt answers Northrop Frye; he answers Greenblatt as Sidney answers Gosson, one set of critics,

in Keilen's terms, equating literature and discourse, and the other setting them apart. These categories, like idealism and pragmatism or integrity and relevance, grant the history of criticism a certain order, and the wheels on the bus go round and round.

*What is literature and does it matter?*³ So asks Jonathan Culler in a recent introduction to literary theory, but the question might just as well serve as a heading for the field of inquiry claimed by the critics of early modern England. The questions underlying the critical thought of the past four-hundred years at least – *Is literature a privileged form of expression or just another form of social action? Does literature as a category transcend or participate in local historical circumstances? What is the relationship between literature and the other arts, the sciences, politics, or private enterprise?* – are enduring questions in the history of criticism and, as we have seen, were newly pressing if not entirely new questions for early modern English critics. Then as now, the invention of the critic consists in the discussion of these questions and in the negotiation of relationships between critics themselves and between criticism and other fields of discourse, including history, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, and linguistics. Much as we might applaud Keilen's attempt to "lay foundations for different kinds of literary history," that attempt overlooks the fact that criticism is, as Jonson might put it, "contrary in itself" and always a matter of different kinds. More useful and, in my view, more interesting than the various sets of opposed categories into which we might be tempted to organize the history of criticism are the principles of active and ongoing discourse and plurality, consociation and contradiction. For, whether they concede to them or not, it is these principles that supply all critics with the means of meaningfully inventing and reinventing themselves.

³ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000), p. 18.

The long list of names with which I began this study was intended to express the characteristic plurality of metacritical thought in early modern England as a challenge to recurrent direct and indirect claims for its coherence. Such claims can be understood in light of changes undergone by the word *critic* in the early modern period, changes which we have inherited. One might plausibly argue that in their use of the word the early moderns registered a process of ideological consolidation that our own era has seen fulfilled. Yet this is hardly the case. René Wellek, a key figure in the history of criticism, readily acknowledges the enduring indeterminacy of the word in the modern era: “The word ‘criticism’ is so widely used in so many contexts – from the most homely to the most abstract, from the criticism of a word or an action to political, social, historical, musical, art, philosophical, Biblical, higher, and what-not criticism – that we must confine ourselves to literary criticism if we are to arrive at manageable distinctions” (*Concepts* 21). “Even here several difficult problems arise,” Wellek continues, and indeed the problems continued even beyond his ability to predict them from the party lines freshly drawn by the New Criticism (*Concepts* 1-20). In the future lay Theory, which would even further divide criticism into various encampments and, with its hubristic capital *T*, indicate a false divide between itself and the millennia of critical theory that came before.

Today we find as unclassifiable a figure as Stanley Fish rather ironically characterizing higher education on his blog by “the absence of a direct and designed relationship between its activities and measurable effects in the world.”⁴ Meanwhile, in 2007, the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association, which in decades prior had dependably provided journalists and politicians with low-hanging satirical fruit, chose for its theme “The Humanities at Work in the World.” The following year, falling numbers in the job market

⁴ “The Last Professor,” *Think Again*, New York Times, 18 January 2009, Web, 21 May 2009, <<http://fish.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/01/18/the-last-professor>>.

inspired what the Chronicle of Higher Education qualified as “a pragmatic streak” in the panels at the conference: one of the speakers on the presidential forum even proposed a shift to “postcritical, or ‘reflective’ reading.”⁵ The idea of the critic, it seems, is still very much under negotiation, and the discourse that continually constitutes and reconstitutes that idea is ongoing. Coherence continues to elude criticism, with critics assuming and being assigned a variety of functions with various degrees of social relevance, all depending, of course, on whom we ask.

⁵ Jennifer Howard, “The MLA Focuses on Teaching – and Job-Hunting Skills – at Its Annual Meeting,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 55.18, Section: The Faculty, (January 9, 2009), A9, Web, 21 May 2009, <<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v55/i18/18a00901.htm>>.

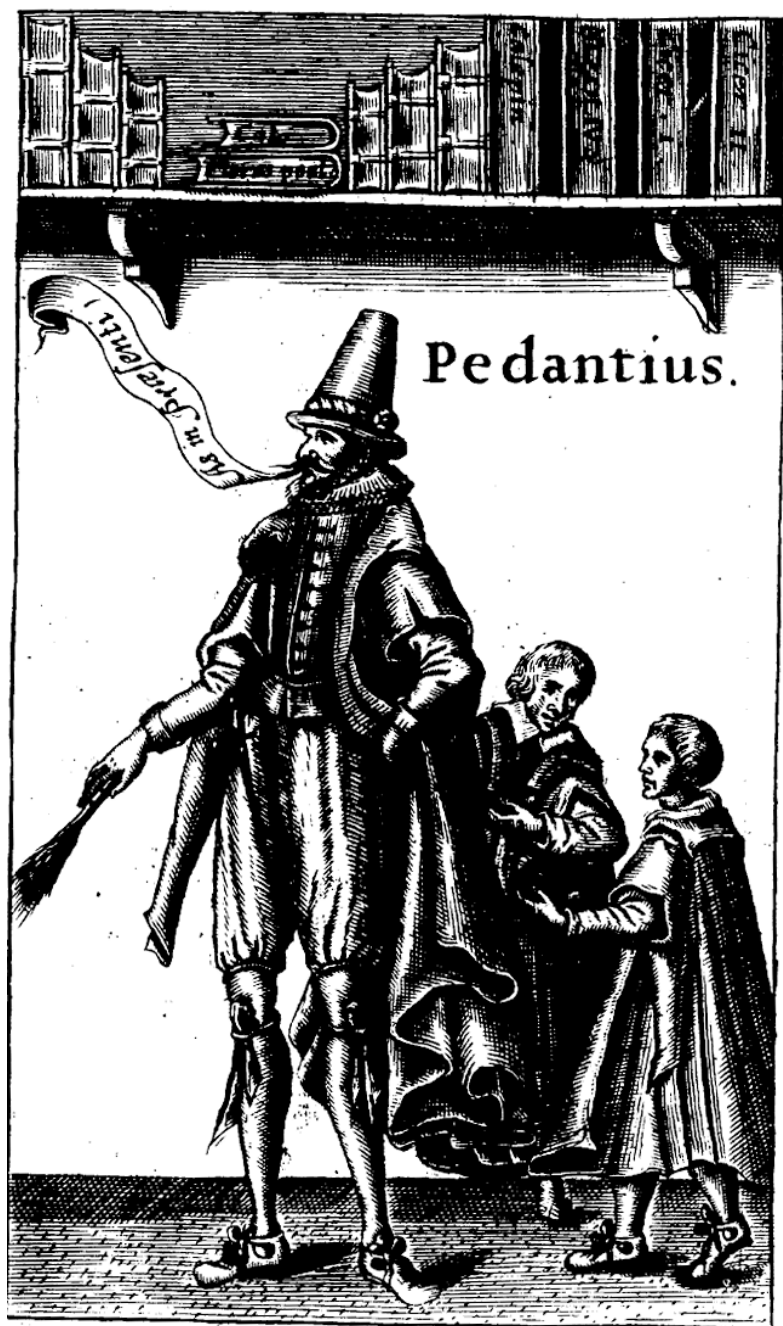


Figure 1. Engraving from Edward Forset, *Pedantius* (London, 1631; sig. [A]2^r; *ProQuest's Early English Books Online*, Web, 18 May 2009). "If I don't occasionally coax him with flattery, he'll never cease flogging me [Nisi interdum blandulis istum delinirem verbis, nunquam abstineret a verberibus]," confesses Ludio of his tutor (Moore Smith, ed., 2.2.826).



Figure 2. *Aristotle and Phyllis*, Lucas, van Leyden, 16th C. (ARTstor, Web, 18 May 2009).

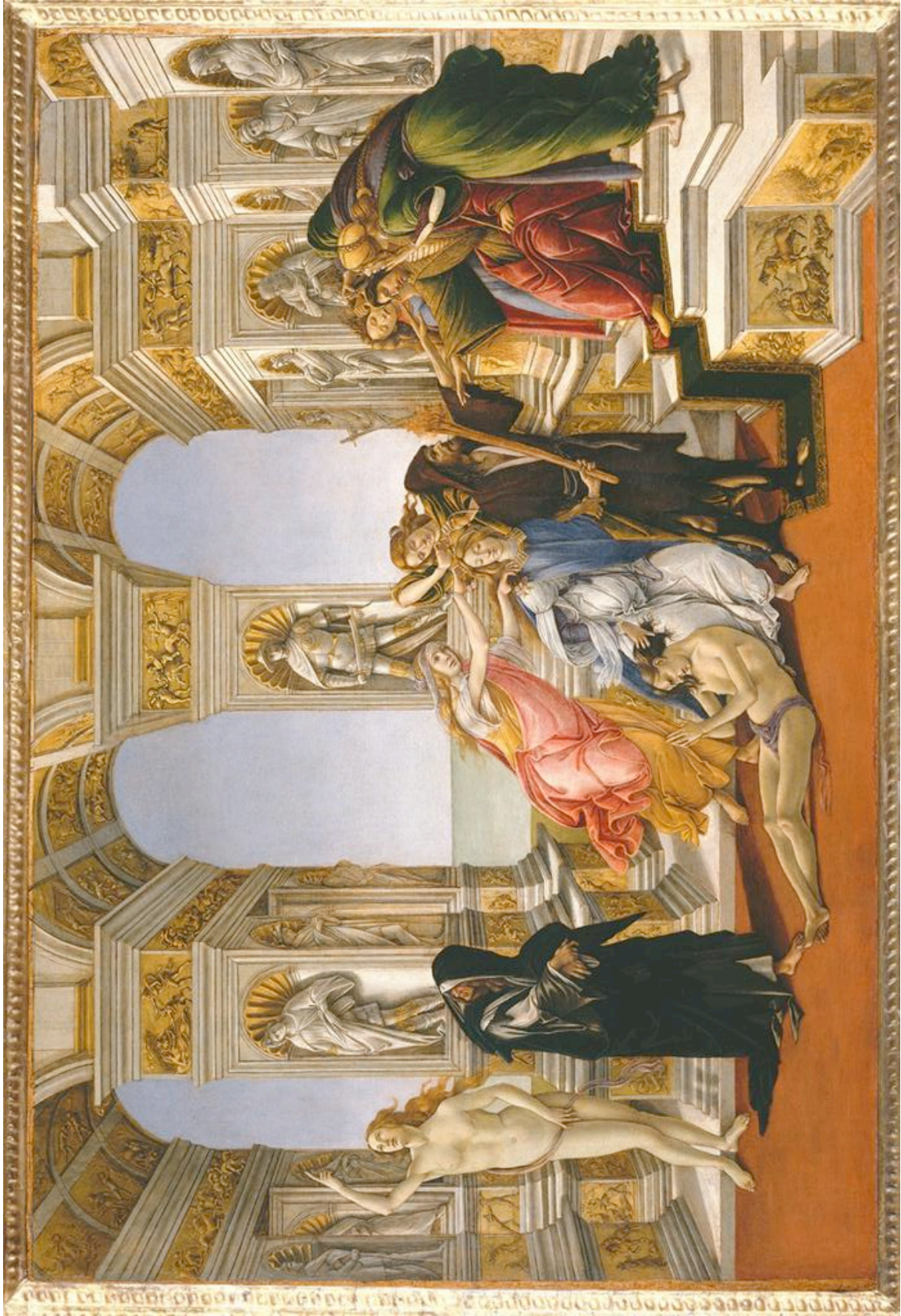


Figure 3. *La Calunnia di Apelle*, Sandro Botticelli, c. 1497 (ARTstor, Web, 18 May 2009).

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